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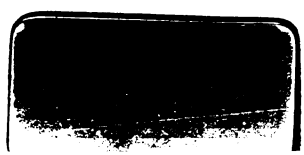

Mary Elizabeth
from M. F. Leonard.
Christmas [illegible]7.

The White Shield

"Hearing his name
the youth turned."
Page 2.

THE White Shield

Caroline Atwater Mason
Author of
"A LILY OF FRANCE," ETC.

I read of the ermine to-day,
Of the ermine who will not step
By the feint of a step in the mire;
The creature who will not stain
Her garment of wild white fire.
—*E. S. PHELPS.*

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This Legend

of Thekla, the Holy Maid of Phrygia,

is Dedicated to

Ruth

RCV'D 1/30/98 GIFT OF Helen Dick

Foreword

Among the apostle legends which circulated throughout the Christian churches of the second century was that entitled the "*Acta Pauli et Theklae.*" This document, itself not later than about A. D. 130, was an amplified and embellished version of a much earlier tale. The original form of the story is proved by internal evidence to have been produced little later than the middle of the first century A. D. Numerous MSS. of the Acta are known to exist, including versions in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Slavonic. Prof. Rendel Harris mentions seeing at Mount Sinai eight or nine different MSS.

During the century following A. D. 70, Asia Minor became "the spiritual center of Christianity." The gospel spread here with marvelous rapidity from the time of Paul, so that we have it on the testimony of Pliny, that in his province of Bithynia before A. D. 112, the pagan ritual was

actually broken up in consequence and the temples were almost deserted.

The opposition was intense. Christianity was abhorred by many as a system, to use the words of Pliny, "destructive of that reasonable and obedient course of life which becomes the philosophic mind and the loyal citizen." Saints and martyrs multiplied under persecution. But Thekla of Iconium is counted the female proto-martyr of the Asian church, and the most illustrious sufferer despite her deliverance. She is worshiped to this day in the Greek communion as the pattern of purest and highest sainthood.

The biographies of the early saints of Asia Minor are however in general deficient in historical value, being profoundly modified or grossly exaggerated in later centuries. These processes have been at work with the story of Thekla of Iconium, and the commonly received versions bear the stamp of crude inferiority and exaggeration common to folk-lore. On going back, however, to the underlying structural features of the original *Acta* we find an accuracy of local detail, a fidelity to established facts existent in the middle of the first century, but

soon after transformed and forgotten, which leave room for but one conclusion. This is the conclusion reached after thorough study and painstaking research by Prof. W. M. Ramsay, who says: [1]

"It is not possible to account for this accuracy in details by the supposition that the story of Thekla is a skillful archæological forgery. . . The tale must be founded on fact and committed to writing by some person not far removed from the events able to compose a history or at least a poetical idealization of history. No other hypothesis seems consistent with the fidelity to a transitory and soon forgotten epoch of history. We must hold that the tale is in part historical, that Thekla was a real person, and that she was brought into relations with the greatest figures of the Galatic province about A. D. 50, viz, Paul, Queen Tryphena, and the Roman governor." The verification of the facts concerning the character and action of the queen, it may be added, is peculiarly striking and complete.

One very marked instance is found in the fact of Tryphena's influence over the governor and high

[1] See "The Church in the Roman Empire before A. D. 170."

priest. While the picture as given in the Acta is true to the precise date in which the scene is laid, it would have ceased to be so after the lapse of a very few years. After A. D. 54 she was no longer a relative of the emperor. The new emperor, Nero, threw ridicule and contempt upon the memory of Claudius, his predecessor.

The *Acta* possesses very great value as being the only extant literary work which throws light on the character of popular Christianity and on its first impact on the social fabric in Asia Minor in the age of the Apostle Paul. The earliest version furthermore possessing features of rare beauty, dignity, and nobleness, it becomes a most interesting task to detach it from the heap of meretricious exaggeration with which it has been covered by the Greek Church in later ages and to present it in a form suitable for popular reading.

As here given the story of Thekla conforms in every essential particular to the earliest known and authentic version of the *Acta*. No liberties have been taken with the material save that in two or three instances minor points have been introduced from the second century version. The

prayer of Thekla in the arena is believed to be genuine and is certainly of high antiquity.

The lyric quotations introduced in the story have been adapted from Shelley's translations from the Greek poets.

C. A. M.

JUNE 1, 1904.

PERSONÆ

PAUL, the messenger of Jesus Christ.

ONESIPHOROS, citizen of Iconium.

DAMODICE, his wife.

HIERAX, his slave.

THEOKLEIA, a noble lady of Iconium.

THEKLA, her daughter.

DERCYLLIS, an attendant on Thekla.

THAMYRIS, a young nobleman betrothed to Thekla.

STEPHANAS, the father of Thamyris.

CASTELIUS, a magistrate of Iconium.

ALEXANDER, high priest of Cæsar.

FLAVIUS, the Roman governor of Galatia.

QUEEN TRYPHENA, cousin to Claudius Cæsar, the widowed and retired queen of Pontus.

Scene, in Iconium and in Antioch of Pisidia and on the road between the two cities.

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The White Shield

I

Lover and Maiden

IT was an April morning in the Phrygian city of Iconium in the year of grace fifty. The air was dewy and laden with pearly mist shot through with rays from the mounting sun. The fragrance of wild violets and of orchard blossoms was wafted through the close-built streets from baskets and garlands in the hands of maidens and children. It was a day of high festival and even at this early hour gay processions were forming before the houses preparing to proceed through the city gates to the groves and temples of Cybele and Dionysus, the ancient and honored Phrygian divinities.

Down the street came alone a young man of patrician aspect, walking with rapid, elastic step. His tunic was girded closely about his athletic body

by a belt from which hung a bow and a quiver full of arrows, while a lute was suspended by a jeweled band from his shoulder. Vigor, confidence, and buoyancy were expressed alike by the smile on his lips and by the imperious grace of his bearing. Passing the house of the silversmith Onesiphoros whose shop windows stared blankly, destitute of the statues and shrines which filled those of his fellow-craftsmen along the street, the young nobleman stopped at a stately dwelling of Græco-Roman architecture rising just beyond.

"Thamyris!"

Hearing his name the youth turned. A group of maidens was approaching with dancing feet, their heads covered with transparent veils and wreathed in blossoms. With his hand on the door which a porter now opened wide the youth, flushed with impatient and yet joyous eagerness, called back a question to the charming throng.

"O bid Thekla hasten," cried in response the foremost of the maidens breathlessly; "see, noble Thamyris, the sun is hours high already, and the dew will be gone from the pine and the lustre from the violet ere yet we reach the grove."

With the words the girl struck a tambourine which hung from her girdle with a jarring burst of melodious challenge. Its vibration thrilled the young man's blood and sent it hotly to his cheek.

"Go on your way as fast as you choose," he cried, "we will follow!"

"Follow! follow!" sang the maidens with sweet, shrill voices and passed on, moderating their music and the measure of their dance that so they might linger and be overtaken the sooner.

Within the house, Thamyris stood in the enclosure of the atrium before a matron of distinguished person and mien and made reverent obeisance. Her lips parted in a smile, amused, complacent, as she noted his scarcely suppressed impatience, and the glow of anticipation on brow and lip and cheek. He needed not to put his question into words.

"The damsel was here but a moment since," said the lady, "ready with wreath and veil and garlands. But thou knowest, Thamyris, how shy she is and playful withal. It may chance she would be sought of thee rather than be found over-ready. Such is the wont, I remember, of young maids when love is knocking at their doors. Seek

her, if thou wilt. She may flee for a little, but she will not choose to escape thee."

Even as the lady spoke Thamyris had caught a glimpse of the hem of an azure robe fluttering between the sculptured pillars in the vista beyond. He needed no second permission to follow and capture his betrothed. With light and bounding step he crossed the intervening space to the open peristyle, whither he doubted not the maiden had fled, but when he reached it no sign, no sound, betrayed her presence. With dashing haste, in which a touch of baffled and threatening ardor was mingled, he sought her behind each pillar and statue, couch and curtain, and then as he bit his lip in impatience which might be strained a thought too hard, a light ripple of laughter came from the gallery over his head, and glancing up again he saw a passing flutter of the azure drapery.

With a bound he reached the foot of the marble stairs which led to the apartments above, but a thought checked him in his hot pursuit. He turned and glanced as in question at the lady mother of his betrothed, Theokleia, who had followed him into the peristyle. She smiled indul-

gently. "Seek her, if thou wilt, the whole house over. She is a willful thing, and deserves not that I should shield her."

Instantly Thamyris flew up the stair and rushed along the dim, pillared passage. Certainly it was this way the laughing voice had led him! Still the form he sought had vanished ere he could reach it. Before him now in a narrow portal hung an embroidered Tyrian curtain. Its folds trembled as if some one had but now thrust them aside. Without staying his steps Thamyris lifted the curtain and sprang into the midst of a room which neither his feet nor those of any man had ever trod before. The first glance showed him that Thekla was not in the room, and the second that the room was Thekla's own, her solitary, secluded maiden shrin

With a beating heart the lover looked around him. Opposite him as he stood was an open window, on whose sill a white dove had alighted even at that moment as it seemed. Near the window stood the virginal white bed, its shining inlaid frame partly covered in silken drapery. On an ivory backed chair lay a trailing peplos of trans-

parent texture, on a table a confusion of jeweled ornaments and polished implements of gold and ivory. Above the table, fitted into a niche in the wall, Thamyris noted a silver statuette of Cybele seated, a couchant lion beneath her feet. On a shelf before the shrine lay fresh pine branches, and upon them, strewn with charming grace, white crocuses and the large Phrygian purple violets, which the ancient myth declared sprang from the blood of Atys. All the place was fresh and fair; full of perfume, purity, silence. The youth trembled with yearning passion and secret awe. For the moment the pursuit of the maiden was forgotten, for he had entered the very shrine of maidenhood itself. And still his blood seemed touched with swift fire, and still on the window sill the white dove sat and crooned its soft, brooding note, and besides was no sign, no sound of life, presence, or motion.

Thamyris advanced a few steps and looked down from the window. Upon what did his dark-eyed Thekla look when she was seated here with her mother or her maidens in the radiant, sunlit hours when he was not admitted to her presence?

But from the window naught he found was to be seen save the commonplace one-story dwelling of Onesiphoros. Through the open compluvium he could see the court below, where women seemed at work under the direction of Damodice, the silversmith's wife, polishing the mosaic floor and busily arranging tables and flowers as if in preparation for an expected guest. But what cared the princely Thamyris, in his ecstasy of love and longing, for the lowly life of these simple folk? Surely his Thekla, his love, cared not to look on scenes like this! He must wait no longer to transplant her to a brighter and more brilliant home, to the paradise of his own shining palace. There she should look out, not on the humble court of an Onesiphoros, but upon the fair fountains, terraces, and colonnades which had made the gardens of his father's palace famous throughout Phrygia, second only, men said who knew, to those of the widowed Pontic Queen, Tryphena.

Hardly one minute had passed since Thamyris had entered the room, but well he knew he must linger no longer, and love urged him now to swift action. He had returned to the entrance, but

paused. The white dove still sat upon the window seat and turned upon him its quiet eyes. Thamyris lifted his bow, set an arrow on the string, and shot with careful aim. It pierced the heart of the unconscious creature, which fluttered and fell on the marble sill, a few crimson drops staining the whiteness of its breast. With a smile Thamyris lifted the dead bird and laid it on the pretty bank of violets and crocuses before the feet of the small silver Cybele. Then dropping upon his knee beside the white bed of the maiden he loved he pressed his lips ardently upon its fragrant draperies and called upon the goddess, wife of the starry heaven, mother of gods and men, by the love she once bore to young Atys, to speed him in his love, vowing a sacrifice of twelve young heifers, the fairest of the herd, if she would give the dark-eyed Thekla to his arms before the next night's moon should rise.

As he turned now at last ready to leave the place he became aware that the curtain was pushed back, then a low cry of dismay and sorrow smote his ears, and he saw Thekla as she stood in the doorway and wept, lamenting that he had killed

her dove, her own pet and fondling. Thamyris threw his arm about the maiden and led her to a bench in the gallery without, covering with kisses her white, unresisting hands. But her tame indifference to his caresses was far less pleasing than her willful, teasing flight had been. With averted face hidden between the rosy palms she would only wail:

"My crocuses and my violets are fading and my dove is dead with blood on her darling breast. I fear you, Thamyris. I cannot love you. Never, never! Go and leave me."

He forbore presently to coax and to implore, and lifting his lute he played upon it an air so softly, tenderly caressing that the maiden could but check her sobs to listen, albeit she still sat with face turned aside, hidden in her hands. Then in a voice charged with pity for her pain, yet compelling in its irrepressible yearning, Thamyris sang to the lute:

"One with feet the fleetest
Cometh from his dwelling.
Some one loves thee, sweetest,
Bright beyond my telling.

In thy grace thou shinest
Like some nymph divinest,
In her caverns dewy;
All delights pursue thee,
Soon pied flowers, sweet, breathing,
Shall thy head be wreathing."

As the last words fell from his lips Thamyris let his lute fall and caught the maiden around her slender waist, and drawing her delicate hands forcibly away with his strong fingers, he kissed her boldly on her lips, while deep blushes rose and spread over the lovely cheeks and smooth white brow.

"Listen, Thekla, listen dearest maid, and fear not to face thy lover, since soon he will be thy husband."

At the word and at the imminent passion which glowed in his dark, brilliant eyes, Thekla sought to draw away from his embrace but in vain; he held her fast.

"Thou hast nothing to fear, my beautiful one, and I have everything to hope. Just now within thy holy virgin temple yonder I vowed a vow to Cybele, and those bright drops on thy dove's white

breast were but its seal and sign. All is auspicious. Thy mother wills what I will in this. My father urges it. To-morrow at this time, my Thekla, if so be the strong-hearted goddess shall speed me, I shall lead thee my bride to my own father's house."

"Oh, not to-morrow, Thamyris," cried the maiden! "That is far, far too soon!"

"Too soon!" echoed the lover; "say rather far too late for my desire. But fear not, dearest, for I will grant thee yet another day in which to make ready. In two days then we shall celebrate our bridal. The feast of love shall be spread for us. Thou shalt be mine own, and men and maids shall sing the praises of the fair bride of Thamyris!"

So speaking the young man drew forth from the inner folds of his tunic a jewel casket, from which he took two bracelets of finely wrought gold studded with emeralds. These he clasped upon the round, white wrists, the maiden paler now and unresisting, while under her breath a quivering sob was drawn at intervals like the sob of a frightened child.

II

The Mysterious Messenger

FOR the moment the day's high revelry had been forgotten. A sudden outburst of wild music and shouting from the street below called Thamyris to his feet, and broke in upon the troubled tension of Thekla's mood.

"Come, come away, my beloved!" and Thamyris drew the maiden gently to follow. As they reached the atrium they found Theokleia awaiting them with silver bowls of sweet wine mixed with spices, and fresh flowers.

As she fastened the garlands around Thekla's waist and shoulders the eyes of Theokleia rested upon her daughter's face with a coldly warning glance.

"See thou stretch not thy lover's patience too far with thy childish, willful coyness," she said in an undertone which conveyed a sinister hardness of determination unlike the cordial graciousness of

her countenance toward young Thamyris. "He is in earnest and so am I."

The door was thrown open and Thamyris now led the maiden into the street, their ears saluted with the deafening tumult of a great procession rapidly advancing toward the house.

Foremost came the ranks of crested Corybantes surrounding the car of Cybele, leaping in the frenzied ecstasy of their dance to the measured clash of their brazen cymbals. In the gilded chariot on her lion throne reposed the effigy of the goddess, the brow encircled by a mural crown, the face heavy and expressionless. Behind the chariot were led fawn-colored heifers, wreaths about their necks, lowing as they went to sacrifice. With flutes and tambourines a sportive company of Iconian youths and maidens followed, mingling together with light and graceful movement in the choral dance, calling to all they met or passed,

"Go forth! Go forth! To the hills! To the hills!"

Suddenly the gay band of revelers wheeled in their march and paused, gazing at another company far behind.

"Come forth, come forth, ye Bacchanals and Bacchantes!" they chanted in wild transports of excitement, intoxicated with their own music. "Toss your necks in ecstasy to heaven's dewy breath like a fawn clear of the hunters! Bring home the Bromian god, Dionysus, son of Semele, child of the god, from the mountains of Phrygia! Let your white feet join the blissful night-long dance! Burst forth, burst forth with blossoms and exalt your Bacchic god in choral strains!"

In another moment the second company had reached them, a dancing rout of youths, naked save for dappled fawn skins fantastically girded about their forms, wreaths of ivy on their heads, light wands in their hands or drums on which they beat incessantly. With these came groups of maidens, their flowing tresses wreathed in crimson convolvulus flowers with bright green leaves and trailing tendrils. The tambourines in their hands were held far above their heads and struck with ever-growing madness of mysterious ecstasy.

But now the whole revel-rout was brought to a halt by the crowd which blocked the narrow street not far beyond the house of Theokleia, strewing

garlands and offerings of brass and silver coin in the high enthusiasm and religious rapture characteristic of the Phrygian mob.

As Thamyris and Thekla stood waiting for the crowd to yield before the procession that they might move onward with it, Thekla observed two men standing in the portal of the house next their own. One of these was a man of reverend aspect, with whitening locks, grave brow, and brooding eyes, which, as she felt them resting on herself, the maid perceived were full of a mournful tenderness. It was the silversmith, Onesiphoros, and behind him in gray woolen tunic, staff in hand, stood his slave, Hierax.

Thekla approached the silversmith, arrested and moved by something of unwonted significance in his look. Despite his humbler station there was sincere affection between him and the fatherless daughter of Theokleia.

"Whither art thou bound, my father?" she asked half playfully. "I see from thy countenance that thou art not minded to seek with us the temple of the Great Mother on the wooded mount, and yet I see thee faring forth staff in hand, thy feet well cased

in marching sandals, thy cloak drawn close and belted high as for a journey."

"In truth, fairest child, I am about to start on a journey, but this only I know concerning it: I am called to traverse the path over the pine-clad hills and steep cliffs even unto Misthia. On the Royal Road from Antioch one shall pass me, even a Messenger, a man whom I have never seen, whose name I do not know. Him I shall meet and bring with me hither to my own house and his message I shall hear."

Onesiphoros spoke in a voice lowered that it might reach Thekla's ear alone, and as he spoke his eyes were filled with a dreamy abstraction as of profound, suppressed awe and wonder.

"Nay, then, good Onesiphoros," replied Thekla, with a child's gentle appeal, her innocent eyes lifted to the old man's face, "how canst thou meet and intercept a Messenger whose name and face are all unknown to thee as he passes on the Royal Road, where so many men pass and ever in companies?"

"I shall know him, my child. I cannot mistake. The features of the Messenger, his port and

mien, have been revealed to me in the night just passed as clearly as thine own. I shall know him. I shall learn of him also, for God sends him."

The girl made a quick, involuntary movement in which surprise and awe were mingled.

"Ah then, if the god sends a Messenger unto thee, my father, thou doest well to go out to meet him. But may Hermes grant to guard thee from evil men, to watch thy steps in the fords of the swollen streams and on the slippery cliff sides, and bring thee safe——"

"Thekla, Thekla!" cried Thamyris, drawing the girl away with impetuous haste; "Seest thou not the procession is moving on again! Spend no more time in gossip with that garrulous old mechanic. On, on to the mount, the groves, and the dells of Atys and of Cybele!"

Again the wild, threatening thrill of the music pierced the air and the Corybantes resumed their frantic dance. The car of Cybele was moving on. Thamyris sprang into a place in the choral band of youths and maidens, drawing Thekla with him and placing in her hand a silver-mounted flute with a gay smile and nod.

The maid put it to her lips, then turned and glancing back at Onesiphoros she caught the solemn sadness and the mute trouble in his watching eyes.

"Farewell, farewell," she cried, and waved her white hand. "Safety and peace be unto thee," and as she was hurried onward in her heart a voice arose and cried, "Safety and peace are with him on his lonely and perilous way rather than with thee in this fierce, wanton gayety."

At eventide Thamyris brought the maiden back to her mother. Their faces were flushed, their garments dusty, their garlands limp and lifeless. Thekla, with a languid word of parting, left her lover and betook her to her own apartments.

"You returned betimes," said Theokleia with watchful eyes fixed on the face of Thamyris. His brow was darkened, his eyes gloomy.

"Yes, we left the revelry hardly yet at its height, with the best yet to be."

"And why did you leave so early?"

"The maiden would not have it otherwise. Small sport have I had with her to-day. While

all the maids besides were bounding along with gladsome mirth and minstrelsy to dally with their lovers in the shaded grove of Atys, she alone has been fain to dwell apart with silent lips and downcast eyes."

"The maid is stubborn and needs discipline. Thou art over-gentle with her, princely Thamyris. Such unbroken colts need to feel the hand of resistless strength upon them and so be made to know their master."

"Say not that my Thekla, my white dove, is stubborn, Lady Theokleia, for such words are harsh and ill befit her case. She is the gentlest of the maids of Iconium as she is the chastest and the fairest."

"Graciously spoken, my Thamyris. In truth Thekla is but a child, and as a child we may well exercise patience toward her."

"Nay, lady, would she were more a child, more like the maidens around her than she hath shown herself of late. Strange thoughts are hers and deep musings, portending what I know not. But forbear to chide her or to compel her further to free-hearted mirth since such is not her mood."

"What then wouldst thou have of me, Thamyris? Say the word only, for I grieve much that the maid has brought to naught thy hopes of to-day's high ecstasy."

"Nothing will I ask of thee, lady, save that Thekla shall be made ready two days hence for our nuptial feast in my father's house and shall go forth from this house my bride."

"I give thee my pledge, most noble Thamyris. Set the feast in order and bid thy kinsfolk and acquaintance. The bride shall be ready and adorned in such state as the house of Theokleia can furnish to its only child, unworthy though my humble best may be of the greater glory of the house of Stephanas."

With this promise the lover went his way, a vague misgiving lingering in his heart.

Thekla, meanwhile, refreshed from the dust and heat of the day's excursion by a cooling bath and fresh anointing of attar of rose, sought the quiet of her own room. But as she entered it first of all to meet her eyes in the fading light was the white dove still lying cold and still before the silver Cybele on the dying violets. A strong shudder

passed over the slender form of the young girl, large tears filled her eyes, and her lips trembled piteously.

"Dead my dove, dead my flowers, dead my desire for the day's wild rapture, the mystic rites of Cybele and Bacchus. They are not for me. I can bear them no more. And how fares it with my love for Thamyris? His eyes frightened me to-day for they devoured my body, and his panting breath, fevered with wine, stained my cheek and his hot and heavy hands locked my wrists like manacles. His bracelets are cruel chains."

In sore impending dread the maiden sank on her knees before the small shrine of Cybele. And the face of the goddess stared pitiless and uncomprehending.

III

The House of Onesiphoros

IT was noon when Thekla awoke and the sun's rays pouring through her open window fell upon a shallow basket of crimson roses, standing before the shrine of Cybele where the dead dove had lain yesterday among the violets and crocuses. That had been tenderly removed and disposed of by Dercyllis. Fruits, cakes, and wine in delicate silver dishes were placed on a tripod beside the bed. The maiden perceived that her slave, her mother, and her lover, had all concerned themselves through the morning hours for her pleasure and refreshment, and a tender smile passed over her face as if one of the sunbeams had touched it.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, its draperies enfolding her white limbs, her dark perfumed hair falling like a cloud about her face, Thekla drew to her and partook of the fruit, the bread, and the wine, in drowsy languor. Her eyes, still

heavy with sleep, were fixed straight before her with the wide, unthinking gaze of a little child.

The golden hush of noon rested upon all things, and remained unbroken for a space, and then in the stillness Thekla became aware of a voice speaking somewhere beneath her window in quiet, measured tones, yet tones which thrilled her very heart mysteriously. She rose, pushing aside the food and wine, and looked down from the window into the open atrium of the house of Onesiphoros, whence the voice plainly proceeded. She saw the figure of the slave, Hierax, plainly through the open compluvium. He knelt on the polished floor below, his hands clasped and dropped before him, his eyes riveted on some person unseen with profound and fervent attention, plainly listening also to the voice whose tones had arrested her. Besides him Thekla saw no others of the household, but she doubted not that all were present. But that voice! Whose could it be? so gentle, so solemn, so strangely speaking to the heart. Onesiphoros himself had not such a voice, nor had she ever heard one like it in Iconium. Moreover, the accent was not Phrygian but rather Syrian or even

Jewish she fancied. Plainly the speaker was a stranger Ah! a sudden thought came to her. It was, it must be, the stranger whom Onesiphoros had gone forth to meet on the morning of yesterday upon the Royal Road from Antioch. It could be no other than the Messenger whom her kind old friend had said the god had sent. Would it not be well, then, that she also should hearken to his messsage?

"This day is salvation come unto this house."

Spellbound, with parted lips, the maiden listened.

"Unto thee, Onesiphoros, and unto thy wife and thy son and even unto all thy house, both bond and free, the grace, mercy, and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ are given if so be ye are ready to receive him."

"We are ready."

In the steady response Thekla could distinguish the deep voice of the silversmith and the gentle tone of his wife Damodice. The lips of Hierax moved silently. The slave felt himself perchance too humble to join his master and mistress audibly.

"With Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek,

there is neither male nor female, there is neither bond nor free." The voice had grown even gentler. "He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman. In like manner also he that is called, being free, becomes the servant of Christ."

Tears rolled down the faithful, furrowed face of the old slave. "The Lord's freeman," he murmured. Thekla felt her own eyes growing dim. But who then was this Christ?

"Onesiphoros, I have learned of thee in Antioch that thou art a silversmith and well skilled, I judge, in the craft," the unseen speaker proceeded. "How chances it that I see the windows of thy shop yonder empty? No shrine is there, no image, no symbol of the gods and goddesses of Phrygia nor yet of those of the Greeks or the Romans. Whence cometh this?"

"Sir, for these many months," Thekla heard the voice of Onesiphoros make answer, "it hath been borne in upon me that these images of gold or silver or of brass should not be placed in the houses of Iconium for the citizens to worship, seeing they are in themselves nothing and the divin-

ities for whom they stand are more lewd and evil than those who worship them. Hence have I ceased to work at my craft, and can do no otherwise even though poverty knocketh at the door."

"Thou hast well done, my brother. In this I see clearly that thou art not far from the kingdom. God that made the world and all things therein hath made all men in his own image, having predestined us to holiness. Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device. Well hast thou done, Onesiphoros. Ready art thou in very truth to turn from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus."

Thekla listened with straining ears lest even one word should be lost.

"To you Greeks," the voice continued, "God, the one only and true God whose I am and whom I serve, would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is in Christ Jesus, God's dear Son, the hope of glory. In him the Father hath freely shown his love, since while we

were yet sinners Christ died for us, the just for the unjust, that in his death our body of sin might die, and in his resurrection from the dead our souls might live. Through his stripes all we are healed, for he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, as the prophets of my people foretold of him in past ages. And he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them, he the holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens, of whom I, Paul, am made a minister."

"Thekla, Thekla!"

It was her mother calling. A step approached the room.

"And so at length thou art awake, drowsy maid, and yet dost delay to make thyself ready for the day's work and pleasure. See, here is a new chiton I have just purchased in the bazaar. Sawest thou ever a more enchanting rose color? And mark, maiden mine, this broidery of gold of the girdle; such a garment is over fine for the daughter of Theokleia, and over costly, but for the bride of Thamyris we must reck nothing

of cost, and so I told the merchant, Gaius, of whom I bought it."

"Oh, mother!" cried the maiden, turning a face pale and rapt from the window, "dearest mother, wilt thou not leave me yet a little longer?" and she stretched out clasped, imploring hands.

Theokleia frowned and turned away in sullen, offended dignity.

"Verily thou art of all daughters the most thankless," she said. "Thy whims are beyond belief or understanding. Seeing thou carest so little for the gift of thy mother I will take it hence with me. Perchance ere nightfall thou wilt be of a different mind." Then relenting, with the lingering pride and persistence of her mother instinct she added almost coaxingly:

"It is the color which of all others suits best the darkness of thy hair, Thekla, and the whiteness of thy skin."

But already Thekla had turned back to the window, and of the last words of her mother she heard not one. Below the voice of the Messenger was saying with melting tenderness:

"Hear also the words of our Lord Jesus that

same night in which he was betrayed: If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

"Oh, that I might see the face of the Messenger," cried Thekla, with streaming eyes. "Oh, that I might sit at his feet!"

IV

The Mystic Sign

ON the low levels twilight had fallen, but overhead the sky was pulsating from horizon to zenith with golden light from the sun just set. Twilight had gathered in the house of Onesiphoros, but as Thekla looked down from her window into the atrium of it, the sunset radiance shining about her head like a nimbus, she could discern through the shadows two figures standing alone by the edge of the impluvium. One was the figure of Onesiphoros. The other she saw for the first time, a firm and vigorous frame, the outline of a massive head. It must be the Messenger. If he would but move forward that she might see his face! Since noon she had not stirred from the window nor ceased, save for brief intervals, to listen to his voice; but his person she had not seen until now.

"See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?"

It was Onesiphoros who spoke. Thekla's heart beat hard with a sense of supreme solemnity which seemed to rest upon him visibly.

"Dost thou, then, with all thy heart believe that Christ the Lord died for our sins, that he was buried and that he rose again from the dead on the third day?"

"This I most certainly believe."

"Onesiphoros, art thou able to drink of the cup of Christ's sufferings, to be baptized if need be with the baptism that he was baptized with?"

"By his grace enabling me."

"Dost thou, my brother, weigh well all that baptism signifies? Art thou, then, fully and faithfully minded to renounce forever the worship of all gods and goddesses, their temples, their symbols?"

"I renounce them all from this time forward."

"Thou art ready, then, to be baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, so putting away the body of sin, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, thou shalt henceforth also walk in newness of life?"

"This is my earnest desire."

Without shadow of doubt or hesitancy each brief response followed each solemn question.

Then Thekla saw how in the silence the Messenger taking the silversmith by the hand led him gently down into the pool and there stood beside him, the water rippling waist high around them both.

Through the twilight hush rose words of prayer, tender and pleading.

"Almighty and eternal God, whose dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ did shed his precious blood for the forgiveness of our sins; who also gave commandment to his disciples that they should go teach all nations and baptize them into his name, grant that unto this thy servant now to be baptized pardon, purity, and peace may be fully given that he may know the Lord and the power of his resurrection, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful children."

Then with the soft sound of parting and meeting waters the form of Onesiphoros was laid gently back with the words, "I baptize thee, Onesiphoros, into the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Again the two men stood together, and Thekla through the deepening gloom, for the sunset glow was fast fading from the sky, could see on the face of her kind old neighbor a light of spiritual exultation such as she had never dreamed of before.

"I receive thee now, my brother, into the flock of God."

Lifting his hand the Messenger held it above the head of Onesiphoros, saying:

"Be of good comfort. Through this sign thou hast made a good confession. Hereafter thou shalt not be ashamed to confess before men the faith of Christ crucified. Manfully shalt thou fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil. By his grace assisting thee thou shalt continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto thy life's end."

"O give me too the sign.'

The words escaped the lips of the watching girl unconsciously in her fervent though half-comprehending sympathy with that which her ears had heard and her eyes had witnessed. But she turned even as the words left her lips. Some one was weeping in the room behind her.

It was Dercyllis, Thekla's devoted slave and attendant.

"O my sweetest lady," she cried, and dropped on her knees before Thekla, clinging about her knees, "listen to me now at last, O listen, I pray you. All day have you knelt in this window, hearing, seeing we know not what, heeding not at all our prayers and entreaties. Thrice have I brought food to you which you have not tasted. Your mother at last is deeply angered, as I have never yet seen her, and speaks darkly of such punishment of your willfulness as makes my heart sick within me to hear. To-morrow is to be your own nuptial feast, gracious Thekla; the lord Thamyris has busied himself throughout the day in preparing for it right royally. Twice has he been here. Twice have you been bidden to receive him, but you have neither turned your head nor signified so much as that my summons was heard. And now, lovely lady, my own precious mistress, the fair lights are shining through all the house below. The sweetest and costliest wines and fruits are preparing, with flowers and dancing maidens and music on flute and viol to grace the last evening

that the child of our house shall remain under the roof of her childhood. Do not turn away again lest some great evil come upon you. Your mother even now declares that you are bewitched by unlawful magic arts of some vagrant sorcerer. For such the neighbors say the silversmith next door has taken into his house."

"Forbear, forbear!" cried Thekla with something akin to sternness in her sweet voice. "I may not listen to such words, Dercyllis. They are blasphemy."

"But listen to me now, my lady. Hear you not his step, your lover's?" and with supreme solicitude Dercyllis drew aside the curtain and held up her hand as if imploring Thekla's attention.

From the direction of the stairs along the passage between the many pillars came now the silvery music of the lute of Thamyris and his voice singing with yearning sweetness as he slowly ascended and approached the room of his betrothed:

"Liquid Peneus was flowing
And all dark Tempe lay
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing
The light of the dying day,

Speeded by my sweet pipings.
The Sileni and sylvans and fauns,
And the nymphs of the woods and waves
To the edge of the moist river lawns,
And the brink of the dewy caves,
And all that did then attend and follow
Were silent with love, e'en great Apollo,
With envy of my sweet pipings.

. . . . .

And then I changed my pipings—
Singing how down the vale of Menalus
I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed;
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed.
All wept, as I think fair Thekla would,
If magic arts had not frozen her blood,
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings."

Thamyris had now reached the open doorway. Dercyllis, flushed with anxiety and trembling with eagerness, stood concealed by the heavy curtain, whose folds her hands still held drawn aside. Below, but well within hearing, she knew Theokleia would be waiting for the issue of this hour.

On a straight and narrow bench drawn close to the window, clad in the simplest of white garments, her head thrown back against the wall, her hair

flowing unbound over her shoulders, her hands clasped upon her knee, Thekla sat, and lifted her dark eyes to her lover, unafraid. Her face was as white as the young moon just showing in the western sky, but it was even calmer, or so it seemed to Thamyris, and it wore a look in which humbleness and gentle pity were strangely mingled with mysterious power.

"Thekla, my betrothed!" he cried, the note of command which he would fain have used turned to almost timid pleading, "why sittest thou here in this melancholy gloom and dimness as if thou wert chained to the spot? Below all is light and perfume and gladness. Turn to Thamyris, dearest maid, and blush as of old at his coming. Thy white face frightens me and thy eyes seem scarce to see me. Ah, come back to me, Thekla, wheresoever thy thoughts are soaring."

"Thamyris, I cannot come. I hear thy voice and the music of thy lute and the soft complaining of thy song, yet I cannot follow. Other voices call me and constrain me. To them I must hearken. No bridal wreath shall ever crown my head, my Thamyris, in earthly marriage. Think no longer

of Thekla. Other maidens of Iconium are fairer and more fain. Seek thee a bride who will mingle in the gay joyance of dance and song and sport with thee after thy heart's desire. My path leads me otherwhere. Farewell, Thamyris. Leave me now, but oh, forgive me. Think of me not wrathfully, I pray, for the God has called me. I cannot choose but hear."

The maiden had risen and stood with lifted head, white and tall like a lovely statue in the pale moonlight, so unearthly in her seraphic sweetness, so remote from the desires of the flesh that the young man's surging passion ebbed like a sinking tide.

Cold at heart, he turned and left her.

V

Thamyris and Theokleia

"THOU comest alone, Thamyris!" A touch of inexpressible scorn mingled with the dismay of Theokleia's exclamation. She stood in the sculptured tablinum below, the soft radiance of many lamps shed round her, waiting for the appearing of Thamyris with Thekla. Surely now on her very marriage eve the maid could no longer remain unmoved by the flattery and persuasions of her princely lover.

"I come alone."

The young man's head was dropped dejectedly forward, his hands hung nerveless at his sides, his step was spiritless.

The lady grew white with anger and humiliation. This marriage was to be the triumphant fulfillment of her long cherished ambition, her fondest hopes. Were her will and the high prestige of the family of Thamyris, the favor and condescension of the

father, the noble Stephanas, and the flattering devotion of the son, the brilliant connection, the envy of all Iconian dames of her own station—were things like these to be sacrificed and brought to naught by the foolish, obstinate whim of that white slip of a girl in her room up yonder? The thought was maddening, impossible; a thing not to be borne. She had controlled the course of the affair up to the very eve; she would carry it through. Nevertheless a desperate foreboding lay upon Theokleia's heart as she spoke again with seeming confidence.

"If she refuses to hear thy voice, she will hear mine and that now instantly. We have borne with her manners too long."

"Nay, lady, I fear me she will listen to thee no more than to me. She hears other voices and to them she yields herself. They call her away from earthly love, she says, and bridal joys."

Theokleia stamped her foot upon the floor in speechless rage.

"Voices!" she cried. "What voices?"

"Thou knowest better than I," replied the youth in sullen hopelessness, "to what voices she

has listened from her window throughout the hours of this day."

"Thamyris, believest thou that what the neighbors say is true, that Onesiphoros has within his house some strange malignant adventurer, some dabbler in magic, who by his very voice can exercise his spells upon silly maidens?"

The young man shook his head gloomily.

"I know not."

"Some strange thing has been going forward in that house all day beyond a doubt," said Theokleia reflecting. "I have paid small heed to the servants' gossip, but they have told how that the silversmith set out on a mysterious journey in the direction of Antioch yesterday in the morning and that in the early hours of to-day, ere yet we were stirring, he was seen to return bringing with him a stranger, a man of foreign aspect, a Syrian Jew. All day there has been no sound or motion about the shop. The doors have been tightly closed and the windows barred. No one has been seen either going or coming, not even old Hierax with meat and bread in his basket. Certain is it that the strange guest has not departed."

"Small doubt it is his voice, I say, then, that has bewitched the brain of Thekla, since, as I but yesterday marked, her window overlooks the house of this mischievous mechanic. She could indeed watch from it the actions and hear full well the words of those who chanced to be in their beggarly atrium, if such were her pleasure."

The contemptuous distaste in Thamyris' voice stung Theokleia to quick alarm. He had borne much, but plainly even his love and patience had their limit, as well they might.

"Dercyllis, come hither!" she called peremptorily to the weeping slave who had but now come down from the rooms above and stood hovering, half hidden between the pillars of the peristyle.

"Thou hast been again and again into the room of thy mistress to-day. I have for the most part kept away from her, thinking so best to shame her and bring her to herself. Tell at once all that thou hast seen or heard or gathered of what has come to pass which has so changed the mind and will of my daughter."

It plainly cost Dercyllis a struggle to reply, for the fear was strong upon her that she might bring

upon her adored young lady some terrible chastisement, but she was powerless to resist the fierce and cold constraint of Theokleia's glance.

"I know nothing noble lady, save that all day my mistress has listened, listened, listened."

"Listened to what?" broke in Thamyris sharply.

"To a voice, a man's voice discoursing in the open court of the silversmith next door. All day, or so it seems to me, his speech has been continued, and ever, while his voice could be heard, my lady has listened as if life to her were in his words."

"Hast thou thyself heard aught of his incantations, woman?" asked Thamyris.

"I have gone out along the inner wall and there hid myself to learn, if it might be, of what he spoke. I could understand little, but he seemed to speak against the gods and to tell some strange tale of one who had been put to death as a malefactor under the law as though he were some great person. And he said that all slaves should be free men and the free be turned to slaves."

Dercyllis added the last sentence with a timid and furtive glance at the face of Theokleia.

An exclamation, half of contempt, half of triumph, escaped the lady's lips.

"Thou hast no further word to give us? Well, then, thou mayest go. We may need thee again, but not at the moment."

As soon as the slave had withdrawn Theokleia held out her hand to Thamyris with a gesture in which a sense of triumph and despotic energy was strongly indicated.

"Our course is plain, my Thamyris," she exclaimed. "Have patience yet a little longer with my poor child. Perchance I have been over hasty in condemning her as stubborn and disobedient. No longer can we doubt that this mysterious guest next door is one who practises unlawful arts and works upon the ignorance of the foolish and unlearned, such as are in the household of Onesiphoros, and of innocent, inexperienced children like our poor Thekla. Didst thou mark his seditious talk as the slave reported it? Straight against law and custom is he interfering. A breeder of insurrection the man is plainly, and a blasphemer of the gods. Some low, scurrilous fellow, doubtless, who has gained knowledge of sorcery and is

using it to tamper with the laws of family and constrain maidens to revolt against marriage and the like."

"Do such offenses certainly come within the scope of our law?" asked Thamyris, the gloom of his face changed by the admission of an almost savage hope into his heart.

"Most assuredly, noble Thamyris. He is a disturber of the peace, a dangerous demagogue, and as such we can complain straightway of him to the magistrate. We must act quickly and secure his instant dismissal from Iconium. Without doubt the spell which his voice and his presence have laid upon the maiden will thereafter be soon dispelled."

The lover's face and form were now energized by swift purpose, his face was softened by returning tenderness.

"Thinkest thou, then, Lady Theokleia, that we might even yet celebrate our nuptials on the morrow?" he cried impetuously. "But now I thought myself on the way to dispatch slaves in all directions to declare it postponed, abandoned—anything that meant despair!"

"Speak no more of despair," returned the mother with strong assurance, "and yet I fear it may be best to send forth the word through the city that the marriage will be delayed for a few days, since we cannot bring this meddlesome magician before the magistrates without witnesses, and time will fail to secure these and to set all in order for the arrest before the morrow."

"But the woman who was here just now, Dercyllis, Thekla's attendant, would not her testimony be sufficient?"

"Nay, the testimony of a slave would not be accepted by the magistrate if the man is a Roman citizen. We must obtain other witness."

"Thou sayest truly. I will go now, and what a man can do shall be done, upon that thou canst rely. There are few doors that open not to golden keys. First, however, I must set in motion the tidings that owing to a slight illness of the Lady Thekla the marriage is to be delayed by a few days. That done, I will scour the whole city of Iconium, I and my trusty servants. They can make their way into every home and haunt high or low by some pretext or device. If the gods them-

selves fight not against us we shall learn by daylight to-morrow something more concerning this infamous enchanter, and shall lay our hands upon some witness who can insure his swift condemnation and speedy sentence."

"Go on thy way, my Thamyris. May the gods speed thee. Fair Aphrodite herself shall yet favor thee. I will spend the hours till dawn in libations and offerings before her shrine."

VI

A Sudden Flight

THE house of Theokleia lay wrapped in silence and darkness after a day of bitter storm and high excitement. Thekla, immovable to her mother's persuasions and threats, yet lacerated and bleeding in spirit from the scourge of her tongue, had gone early to her own room, and without undressing had thrown herself upon her bed and fallen into the deep slumber of exhaustion

Dercyllis had come to her door on tiptoe many times, but at length had gone away satisfied that the maid would not waken again, and had so reported the case to Theokleia.

Shortly before midnight some sound in the adjacent house reached Thekla's ears. She stirred uneasily, then awoke, and with sudden recollection and impulse sprang noiselessly from the bed and to the window. A light was moving in the court of Onesiphoros. It proceeded from a lamp

held in the hand of the silversmith himself. He was wrapped in a dark mantle and appeared to have at the moment entered from without. Such Thekla with piercing eagerness instantly realized to be the fact. If she might but hear his words, for he was speaking! Damodice had hurried into the court to meet him. Both their faces showed haggard and spectral in the yellow lamplight, and full of sorrowful anxiety.

"Thou comest alone, my husband?" Thekla heard Damodice's words in the midnight hush.

"Yes. I could not do otherwise. The magistrate, Castelius, has set to-morrow before noon for the hearing. Until then he is to remain in the inner prison."

"But surely," said Damodice a moment later, "they have naught whereof to accuse him. They can but let him go, for what evil hath he done?"

Onesiphoros shook his head sadly.

"I fear me greatly for him. Some one has been at work against him mightily; some one who has money and power. Both have been used. There are witnesses, at least there is one I am certified, who will not scruple to accuse him."

"Who can he be?"

"One Hermogenes who was his disciple in Antioch and even followed him hither, but is now bribed to betray him."

"But of what can such as he accuse him, my husband?"

"Of speaking against the gods, of interfering in the life of the family, dissuading maidens from marriage——"

A cry of uncontrollable dismay and distress broke from Thekla's lips. She could divine who had been at work with power and money against the Messenger, could perceive that it was for her sake that he was now in prison. She had been a witness from her window during the afternoon just past of his arrest by the officers of the city tribunal. The sound of her cry must have faintly reached the ears of Onesiphoros or of his wife. Instantaneously the light was extinguished and their voices were still. Not a sound or sign now broke the silence of the moonlit night.

Thekla withdrew at last from the window, and for an hour, while all about was still, sat in deep thought. A purpose was fast shaping in her mind.

As a result, two hours after midnight, when all men sleep soundest, she rose, and with firm, swift action, wholly without hesitation or excitability, wrapped herself in a dark hooded peplos. Then, after careful deliberation she selected from the costly ornaments of her toilet table a small oval hand-mirror of exquisitely chased and burnished silver. This she fastened to her girdle by a silver chain. At the door she listened for a few breathless seconds. The house was still. Swift and noiseless were her footsteps as she sped on down the stairs and through the sleeping house to the vestibule where the porter sat dozing beside the outer door. He looked up as he saw the figure of Thekla close before him, rubbed his eyes open and stared at her as much in terror as in recognition.

"Is it you indeed, gracious young lady? Surely I cannot mistake your face? What is your wish, your errand?"

"Thou must open the door for me, and thou must not speak aloud now nor make known later my going forth."

Thekla spoke with soft imperiousness as one accustomed to swift obedience.

"Nay, but gentle lady," murmured the astonished porter, "it would cost me dear if I should permit you to go forth from your mother's house into the streets of Iconium at such an hour of night unattended. I may not leave my post. I dare not obey you."

Thekla had released the mirror from its fastenings. Placing it in his hand she whispered:

"This is thine Marcus, and well thou knowest its value, if thou wilt but slip yonder bolt and turn thy great key, and say nothing. The blame shall all be mine, I promise thee. The mirror, thine."

The man's face had changed, its resolve relaxed. He looked from the silver surface of the mirror to the sweet, commanding face above him. He had known Thekla since she was a child and never had he heard a harsh or haughty word from her lips or known of her attempting an unworthy action. Without a word he arose, slipped the bolt, drew from his tunic the key and turned it in the lock. Without another word on either side Thekla came into the street and the door was noiselessly closed behind her.

Hardly did she marvel that no one met her on her dark and lonely way through the silent streets to the city prison; hardly would she have heeded any who had done so, so absorbed was her mind and forward bent on her purpose. On the prison door, studded thick with iron nails and iron banded, she knocked long in vain, bruising her small, delicate hands upon its massive surface. Roused at length, a surly, sleepy turnkey stood before her, a torch in his hand, an oath on his lips which dropped half uttered when he saw the lady's face and heard her request to enter.

Without a word he drew the door wide open and signified that she might come in. Within the grim and frowning stone walls of the prison hall the maiden stood, her hood falling from her head, her face pale but calm and very beautiful.

"I would see Paul, the Messenger," she said quietly and smiled with the gentle confidence of authority into the swarthy face of the turnkey, which showed fierce and lowering in the red and flickering light of the torch.

"Nay, lady," said the man stoutly, shaking his head as one whose firmness can neither be

cowed nor commanded. "Such a thing would be impossible. No entrance to the prisoner could be given even at this hour or at any time without the express command of the magistrate. Have you come with such command?"

Thekla shook her head.

"I thought as much," and he smiled meaningly. "It were, in sooth, an odd permission to give a maiden at this hour of the night. You would best betake you homeward as speedily as you may."

"I have come with pain and peril to see this man for a purpose most pressing and thou wilt not forbid me. My soul's peace waits upon words which he can speak." The maiden trembled now, she hardly knew why, since heretofore she had been unafraid. The man still remained unmoved, looking at her with dogged wonder mingled with obvious impatience.

Thekla lifted her hand to draw her hood back to its place. She could not go, she could not stay. But how could she attain her purpose? She noted with quickened perception that the dull eyes of the turnkey followed the motion of her hand with a sudden gleam of greedy interest. It

must have been the bracelet which Thamyris had placed upon it and which she still wore which attracted his notice. Quick as a flash both bracelets were stripped from her wrists.

"Take these, my friend," she said, and held them out to the man. "They are thine if thou wilt but grant me the interview I seek."

The magnificent color of the emeralds with which the bracelets were set flashed out in the torchlight before the turnkey's eyes as they lay on the girl's extended palm. There was a moment of breathless silence. Then he turned with an awkward motion to her to follow and led the way down through a damp, subterranean passage. In its gloomy depths he stopped at last before a narrow door, took from the rattling bundle at his belt one heavy key, unlocked the door, and threw it wide. Within was darkness and silence as of a grave.

"Thou must enter and announce to the prisoner, Paul, that the daughter of the noble Theokleia, neighbor of the silversmith Onesiphoros, is here and craves to speak with him. Leave thou thy torch in the cell within; the door must stand open

as it now is, and thou must keep guard thyself before the threshold. Is this clear? Dost thou understand?"

The maiden's cheek was slightly flushed as she spoke and her tone was of imperious command rather than of meek imploring.

Something in the nobleness of her bearing and her beauty had pierced at last the coarse perceptions of the turnkey.

"Lady, I understand. You are safe now and your name is safe forever. Trust me for that."

Into his hand Thekla slipped the bracelets, but he put them back into her own without a word, disappearing then in the gloomy depths of the cell. A moment later he returned to her side.

"You are freely admitted," he said with grave and even humble respect, "Paul the prisoner bids you enter."

VII

In Paul's Dungeon

THE flickering torchlight was thrown upon the figure of a man standing erect, his head slightly thrown back against a stout central pillar which upheld the low vaulted roof of the cell. A mantle wrapped about him fell to the floor; across his breast his arms were folded, but from a manacle on each wrist depended a connecting iron chain. The eyes were sunken and hollow with weariness, the whole countenance rugged and careworn, and yet a unique spiritual illumination rested upon the face, a patient dignity upon the whole figure which acted upon the excited maiden with overpowering effect.

Thus far no word had been spoken, but as the turnkey withdrew to the corridor Thekla fell upon her knees at the feet of the Messenger, and lifting the rough and rusted chain which fell from his manacles pressed her lips upon it, while her tears

flowed unchecked upon the harsh surface of the iron links.

The maiden's action and the look she wore denoted the impulse of worship.

"Nay, my daughter, see thou do it not. Worship God. I am but the Messenger of Jesus Christ, Paul, and a prisoner for his sake," something of sternness was in the voice she had learned to love.

"O my father," cried the maid sobbing grievously, "forbid me not to kiss thy chains. If but Thekla's kisses might melt the cruel iron, since it is for Thekla that thou wearest it! Yes, it is I who have brought thee to this prison."

"How sayest thou so, my child? Cease thy weeping. Where God is there is no fear. This place has no terror to me, and can hold me no longer than my God permits. Be of good comfort, then, rise and let me hear thy errand."

Then in broken, childish language, Thekla poured out her story in the ears of Paul; how she had become filled with loathing of the revels and rites of Cybele and Dionysus and had come to shrink from the approach of the lover to

whom her mother had plighted her troth; how all her life had suddenly grown insupportable to her as she felt the longing for something higher, for a diviner love and for purer hopes. Then she described how she had heard his own voice in the house of Onesiphoros, and how his message had brought unspeakable longing to her heart, and the conviction that her marriage to Thamyris, and the life of splendid corruption and luxury which lay before her as his wife, were forever impossible. For this reason, she further revealed to him, there could be no doubt, he had been arrested and brought to this prison on the charge of interfering with family customs and dissuading from marriage.

"What, then, shall I do, my master?" she cried. "Whatever thou biddest me I will do it. All my soul is drawn out of me in remorse and sorrow. Gladly would I follow thee to the earth's ends, so to learn of thee all, all that thou canst make known to me of the love of Christ. But since it is in my concern and behoof that thou art brought to this pass I feel all unworthy to be thy follower. Very willingly for thy sake, if thou biddest me, will I go back and let my mother have

her will and give me as his bride to Thamyris—yes, that even, if thou sayest the word."

Still kneeling on the cold floor of the cell, her peplos falling all about her lovely shape, her head raised, Thekla lifted her dark eyes now to the face of the Messenger, and in them he perceived a light of excited ecstasy; her whole frame, he noted, was trembling with the mystic's religious rapture.

Sadly his quiet eyes rested upon the impassioned face, the thrilling, eloquent figure. The Phrygian fervor ran in her blood with all its native, wild abandon of self-devotion. Passion, enthusiasm, the girl's pure but ecstatic imagination, the enamored fancy of a new religious dream, here held sway. Thus far it was to the feet of himself, Paul, that they had brought her. He lifted his heart to God, praying silently that his own spirit might lead her in that hour to the feet of Christ.

"Thekla," he said with gentle authority, "I cannot speak unless thou first rise. Unto Christ my Lord, and him only, let thy knees bow and thy tongue confess. Paul is to thee nothing save the Messenger of salvation, a sinner like all other

men, nay, chiefest of sinners save for the grace of God. Let him be to thee as in the beginning, a Voice and a Voice only. Speak not of following me. With no winning words would I entice thee. Paul seeks no follower, Paul has no friend but Christ."

The girl had risen at the first words of command which he had spoken. Her face had lost its sudden glow and color, her eyes their brilliant light. A deeper awe, a more solemn perception were dawning. The mastery of Paul's own presence was yielding before an influence yet more august.

"Speak to me, my master, for I listen."

Something of divine benignity softened the face of the apostle as he noted the maiden's childlike humility and submission. With tenderest patience he began then in the chill and gloom of the ill-lighted cell, while the jailer paced steadily before the open door, and taught her, as if she had been his own child, the story of the cross in its simplicity, its severity, its lofty sweetness, its divine sufficiency.

With large eyes riveted upon his face Thekla listened, gaining in fullness and proportion the

conceptions heretofore vaguely, confusedly caught, felt heretofore as impressions rather than apprehended as living truths. Gradually the sense of pardon, purity, and peace through Christ rose in might within her heart. A new light, a nobler exaltation illumined her face.

"Him will I follow!" she cried softly, her eyes no longer searching Paul's face, but fixed beyond it and above. "Him only will I serve."

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit."

During the last moment a loud knocking had been resounding through the prison, and the jailer had hastened to the outer door. It was dawn. Hardly had the words of benediction left the lips of Paul when swift steps were heard along the corridor and Thamyris stood in the open door. His eyes full of fierce and scornful anger turned from the face of the prisoner to the figure of his affianced.

"Come, shameless girl," he said harshly, and drew her forth by the hand. "Thou hast been long enough under the spell of this abominable sorcerer." Then turning at the door he cried with vehement passion:

"For thee, thou meddler in other men's matters, thou destroyer of peace, thou seducer of virtue, the scourge will be ready, I can promise thee, an hour hence, and banishment, may the gods grant forever, from the walls of Iconium!"

VIII

The Rose Rampart

"FOR a month, Thekla, we have borne with thee patiently, seeking to recover thee to a better mind. We have waited and watched believing that the evil spell which that wicked magician cast upon thee would lose its power with time. The patience of Thamyris has been beyond belief. Other men of his rank would long since have cast thee off, would have told the tale abroad of thy madness in visiting that low criminal in his loathsome cell by night, and so have blasted forever thy good name and brought undying shame upon thy mother's house. Surely such patience must win thy wayward will back to its lawful love."

Thekla, pale and languid, stood before her mother in the beautiful pillared tablinum into which the June sun was streaming. She had been that morning released from a mild species of imprisonment of a month's duration in a cham-

ber far removed from her own, where no sight or sound could possibly reach her from the house of Onesiphoros.

"Tell me, my Thekla, my poor deluded child," and something of tenderness touched the cold voice of Theokleia, "that thou art ready now at last to bring back joy and gladness to all our hearts by thy speedy marriage. Thamyris will be here soon. He comes in full expectancy that thou art ready to yield."

Even as she spoke a gay burst of music, the flute and cymbal and tambourine, touched with fine and yet clamorous and exciting melody was heard at the outer door. A troup of tiny girls in white chitons, bearing long garlands of pink roses, came dancing with light and graceful feet through the atrium. Spying Thekla as she stood, heeding not how white and wan her face, the trembling lips, the tears hanging on the dark, sweeping eyelashes, they broke out into a merry song and circled around her, dropping their garlands as they passed her at her feet. In a few moments the last flying feet had come and gone, and the maiden stood in the midst of the encircling garlands, as they lay,

a mighty rose wreath or flowery wall, on the polished marble floor. As the last notes of their song died away Thamyris, magnificently dressed, entered and crossed quickly to the tablinum.

Bending low in graceful homage, he cast his eyes first aside at Theokleia who was watching all that passed with supreme eagerness, and then at the face of Thekla as she stood surrounded by the rose garlands.

"Within the magic circle of those fragrant roses, my Thekla," he cried boldly, "art thou, with love and joy, sunshine and beauty, and all that Aphrodite bestows to make glad the heart of man. Here without, in gloom and cold and loneliness stands thy lover. Here he has stood now these many weary weeks. Say the word, my fairest Thekla, bid me now at this moment leap the wall of roses to thy side. That is all I ask!"

The ring in his voice, the flush on his cheek, the eager lustre of his eyes, told plainly that in asking this he asked everything which was hers to give.

Thekla clasped her cold hands tightly together and stood within the mimic rampart of her roses, as if at bay. Cruel love and cruel pride were

"'Say the word, my fairest
Thekla, bid me . . . leap the wall.'"
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piercing her from the eyes of lover and mother as with arrows. Could she withstand the siege longer? Surrender meant ease and pleasure, luxury, praise, feasting and flattery, pride and power. Repulse meant the *via dolorosa*, cheerless gloom, angry scorning, loneliness, calumny, and ah! what else, far worse than even these? A trembling premonition of unknown dread and anguish shook the girl's slender frame visibly. Suddenly then the scene about her seemed transformed. For chains of roses and polished marble floors, sunshine gleaming on sculptured pillars, the voice of music with warm fragrance on the air, she saw a rough stone floor and mouldering walls, manacles and iron chains, and the tawny light of a single torch casting distorted shadows. But in the dimness of that cell she saw again the worn face of Paul the prisoner with the light of God and the patience of hope upon it, and again she heard him say, "Be of good comfort. Where God is there is no fear."

"Thamyris," she cried, no tremor as of terror in her voice: "I cannot bid thee come. I go."

Turning she lightly leaped the encircling rose

wall and fled up the stairs to the remote chamber in which she had been latterly confined. What would follow?

Desperate measures, doubtless; of that the rigid harshness of her mother's face had given warning. In another moment she heard the steps of Thamyris as he strode in hot anger from the house, the door crashing furiously after him.

IX

Before Castelius

THE sweet light of another June morning brought no sense of promise or comfort to Thekla. She received the food which Dercyllis brought her in sorrowful silence. The very air seemed to her heavy with dread, of what she knew not. The slave she saw had been bitterly weeping; she came and went with averted head that her mistress might not observe her swollen, tear-stained face.

While Thekla was still at her toilet confused sounds from below gave token of some unusual occurrence, and in another moment Dercyllis appeared and in silence assisted her mistress in completing the arrangement of her hair and dress.

"Why are you in such haste, Dercyllis?" asked Thekla piteously, "and why do your hands tremble so?"

"Hasten, my lady, as fast as you may," murmured the slave, and left the room, returning with

a voluminous robe of transparent white silk which she now held ready to draw around Thekla's shoulders.

"But Dercyllis, I am not going out," replied Thekla. "I have no heart to go anywhere now, as thou knowest well."

"Nay, dear lady, let me wrap this about you, for go you must. They are waiting for you below and with scant patience. Come. I cannot conceal it longer," and with an irrepressible groan she wailed: "O my lady, it is the officers of the law who are waiting for you below. They have come to summon you to appear instantly before the magistrate."

For an instant every trace of color forsook the girl's face and her eyes were like those of some wild, hunted, innocent fawn. Then with a gesture of proud submission she said to the slave:

"Wrap the mantle well around me, good Dercyllis, over my head and leave a fold free to draw over my face. Yes. So it is well. Who will go with me? Does a maiden go alone with soldiers to a hall of justice? I had not thought it. My mother——? '

"She will not go, Lady Thekla."

"And thou?"

They had already reached the foot of the stair. Between the pillars of the atrium Thekla caught the glitter of the steel corselets of the Roman soldiers.

"And thou, Dercyllis?" she urged, her step faltering.

"And I—am forbidden!" And with the words the slave sank in a miserable heap on the floor, beating her breast and wailing heartbroken. A light touch from Thekla's hand strayed over the poor bent head.

"Farewell, my poor Dercyllis." The words came in a tender whisper with a faint sob undertoning it. "Thou hast been faithful, true. Farewell."

Then she walked rapidly forward to meet the armed man who had already caught sight of her in the distance and was advancing in her direction.

"Whither am I to go, good sir?" the girl asked, holding the folds of her veil over her face.

"To the presence of Castelius, our civic magistrate, lady, and with all possible haste."

As she followed the man and his fellow-soldier, Thekla cast one longing look through all the beautiful sunny spaces of her home for a sight of her mother, but in vain. She was hurried on with scant ceremony past the astounded Marcus and out into the street.

The shop of Onesiphoros was closely locked and barred, but the sight of the house inspired Thekla with sudden resolve.

"Wait," she said with authority. "I will not appear alone and unprotected in a public hall if so be a friend is at hand. Permit me to ask for a word with the silversmith Onesiphoros. He is a kind friend to me, and fatherly, and he will even be willing if need is to say a word in my defense, though in truth I know not of what I am accused."

"Walk on, gracious lady, if you please, and delay not the course of justice by further useless requests. The house of Onesiphoros has been empty and forsaken for a month, and no one in Iconium knows whither the family has fled."

With these words the soldiers hastened on with rapid, even strides, their truncheons rattling against their leather tunics as they walked, their helmets

shining in the sun. A remembrance of the April morning so short a time before when she had sallied out from her home with music and garlands, led by her lover's hand, sped by her mother's wishes, flashed through Thekla's mind. In the few weeks between she had herself been transformed and all life for her. But it might yet be that her lover's hand and her mother's were no less leading her forth at this hour between these stern men of the civic guard than when she had joined the choral dance of youths and maidens.

In the great hall of justice Thekla was led before the rostrum on which sat the magistrate in his carved chair, a table heaped high with manuscripts near at hand presided over by a clerk. No one else was present save the guard stationed at the door and the two soldiers who had brought Thekla thither, who stood at a slight remove from her, their hands on the handles of their short swords.

Castelius, an Iconian, educated in Rome, was a man of fashion and anxious to be considered Roman born. He had just come from the bath and was arrayed in rich robes, his hair elaborately curled, his handsome, well-cut face fresh from the

hands of barber and perfumer. He glanced up at the slender, veiled figure as it stood before him with some slight curiosity, then saying carelessly:

"Remove the covering from thy face, maiden," he bent a glance of careful scrutiny upon a large intaglio of Artemis in a signet ring on his left forefinger, a recent acquisition.

As Thekla reluctantly drew aside the concealing folds of her mantle the door of the hall was thrown open and a herald announced with a flourish that the most noble Prince Stephanas entered. Glancing up quickly, Thekla recognized with a thrill of dismay the imposing figure of the father of Thamyris, whose powerful physiognomy, marked by advancing years and excesses of high living, bore a haughty and sardonic smile.

Stephanas and Castelius exchanged salutations, obsequious on the part of the magistrate, brief and distant on the part of the older man, who regarded Castelius as a mere inferior official deserving of slight consideration from a man of his rank.

"Most noble Stephanas, thou art come, as I believe, to prefer charges against this damsel,

"Castelius ran over the record
speaking hastily disjointed words."
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Thekla, daughter of Theokleia. I am ready to hear thee in the matter."

Speaking in a tone of negligent, ironical distaste, his eyes glancing casually and coldly upon Thekla's face, Stephanas spoke.

"The cause of my coming hither, worthy Castelius, is the defense of our homes and our customs, and by no means that I would embarrass or disturb this young woman. She has been the victim, without doubt, of nefarious practices at the hands of one Paul, a vagrant from no one knows where. If I remember aright, the man was brought before thee some weeks since as a lawbreaker."

Castelius turned and spoke to the clerk at his side, who, after some searching through the manuscripts before him, handed a scroll to the magistrate. Castelius ran over the record, speaking hastily disjointed words as they caught his eyes.

"Date of five weeks gone. Man named Paul of Tarsus—Roman citizen—accused by Demas and Hermogenes—charge: sorcery, blasphemy of the gods—interference with family customs—practice of magic arts on maidens whereby they be-

DOCUMENT

came averse to marriage—condemned—scourged —evicted from the city."

Castelius handed back the scroll.

"Yes, yes, thou art right, most noble Stephanas. I remember the man perfectly."

"It is well. The damsel before thee is one upon whom this miscreant has worked his spell. I am here to testify that from a cheerful, docile, affectionate maiden, affianced to the son of a not ignoble Iconian house, she has been transformed to a stubborn, incorrigible person, gloomy, perverse, alienated in mind and heart from lover and mother, home and companions. Nay worse, she has carried her strange fancy for this same Paul to scandalous lengths, which I will not defame her now by recounting, and has, since his departure from Iconium, refused to do her homage to her household gods. The case is before thee, worthy Castelius. It needs not that I should tell thee, who art thyself Phrygian born," and a sarcastic smile played around the lips of the speaker, "that the wives and daughters of this our fair province have ever enjoyed unwonted prominence, privilege, and influence. Their voices are heard in

our counsels, their persons are held in highest esteem. The rather for this reason does the conduct of this maiden become the more inexcusable. Nay, if such rebellion, disobedience, and lawless life shall be condoned by our judges, the foundations of our homes, the peace of our city, the fair fame of our noble matrons and our unsullied maidens shall suffer grievous harm. I plead for sentence, Castelius, sentence such as befits the gravity of the offense, not the youth and innocent aspect of the offender."

So saying, with haughty assurance that his word was sufficient, Stephanas swept from the court room, leaving Thekla again alone to confront her judge. She did not catch the curious glance of intelligence which passed between the two men in the last moment.

"What hast thou to say for thyself, Lady Thekla?"

A touch of pity was in the tone of Castelius and in his face as he scanned the face of the lonely maiden thus scathingly accused. She did not speak.

"Most fitting were it that heavy sentence should

be passed upon thee in accordance with the demands of thy accuser, since the truth of his charges is confirmed by thy silence. Nevertheless thy youth, thy gentle birth, thy maiden innocence plead for our forbearance, but thy misguided willfulness calls for our severest censure. This time I will let thee go punished only by the sense that all men speak ill of thee as an unworthy and disobedient daughter of a most honorable house, as one who has shown defiance to authority and to those righteous and ancient laws which underlie the integrity of our State. Go, then, daughter of Theokleia, but go in the spirit of filial meekness and submission, knowing this well, that if thy foolish and wicked courses are persisted in, the heaviest penalties of our civic law await thee."

With a gesture he dismissed her, leaning back with a complacent glance at his clerk to note the effect upon him of his unwonted eloquence. Thekla turned and slowly walked away. Before she had reached the door Castelius had drawn from some safe hiding-place a polished metal mirror and had become absorbed in studying the arrangement of the well-curled locks upon his temples.

X

Disowned

AT the door of the Hall of Justice, beyond the guard, Thekla caught sight of the figure of Marcus, the porter.

With a piteous sob of relief she flew to his side, crying:

"Oh, my good Marcus, thou art come to take me home, to shield me from these cruel men who stare upon me with looks which frighten me. Hasten, hasten."

Trembling violently the maiden laid her hand upon the arm of the slave with gentle urgency.

"A moment, a moment, Lady Thekla," whispered Marcus, allowing himself to be led a few paces from the door, muttering and cursing under his breath at every step, and brushing away the moisture which dimmed his eyes with the back of his hand. "There is a message for thee here."

With these words the porter handed her an ivory tablet. On it were written these words:

"To her who was once my daughter and who yet may be, Thekla, Theokleia sendeth greetings. If the lesson has sufficed, come to thy home as its obedient child. If thou art still bent on disobedience enter it never again, for if this be thy mind thou hast no longer a home in Iconium nor a mother in Theokleia."

Thekla read the words thrice over, repeating them under her breath with white and trembling lips. The sight of Marcus waiting with an agony of pleading in his dim old eyes and clasped, outstretched hands at length convinced her of the reality of her mother's purpose. Dazed, bewildered, she stood irresolute. For a moment heart and flesh sank under this new ordeal. Could she, a delicate maiden cared for all her life with gentlest guardianship, wander homeless along the highway, unattended, with nowhere to lay her head? Whither could she flee? Who would receive her? No friend in Iconium, well she knew. And yet to return home meant to abandon all for which she now lived. Oh, where was her master, Paul, the Messenger? If she could but come once again into his presence he would

show her what she should do, he would comfort, cheer, and guide her in the thorny way her feet had turned to tread.

"O Lord Christ, lead me to my master Paul."

The prayer rose from her heart, and with it light and color came back to her face, firmness to her limbs, courage to her heart. She held out her hand to Marcus. He covered it with kisses, pouring out a flood of entreaty for her return.

"Not now," she said, gently releasing her hand. "Thou must return alone. Farewell."

Already she had turned to leave him, unable to support the anguish of his imploring, fearful that she might yet yield to the piteous longing of her own tired heart for rest and peace and protection.

"But whither, whither wilt thou go, my lady?" cried Marcus in terror as he perceived her full purpose.

"I know not, good friend," she said, and smiled upon him a smile of unearthly sweetness. "My God will lead me. Therefore I will not fear."

With the words she went swiftly onward along the street, turned a corner, and was lost to the eyes of Marcus.

XI

On the Road to Antioch

OUT through the west gate of the city with rapid steps sped Thekla, still dazed and bewildered by the incredible change which an hour had wrought in her condition. Suppressed sobs shook her as she went and behind the close drawn fold of her white mantle tears streamed unchecked down her cheeks. Homeless, orphaned, outcast, despised, rejected, knowing not whither to turn, she was yet strangely upborne by faith in Him for whom she was ready to forsake all things and count them but dross. She was steadied too, by the well-defined purpose to search out and discover Paul the Messenger. From his lips she would ask the blessing which all men besides denied her. At his hands she would receive baptism, the sign and seal of her full confession of Christ, for which her heart cried out as her first duty, her high and holy crown. Would not then all be well?

She chose the west gate by which to leave Iconium because it was the soonest reached from the Hall of Justice, and she longed to escape as speedily as possible from the crowded streets, the curious eyes, the chance encounter of friends. Moreover, it was through this gate that Paul had first entered Iconium with Onesiphoros, coming from Antioch, and through it she believed he would have left the city after the cruel scourging which he had suffered for her sake by the order of Castelius. It might even be that he had withdrawn as far as to Antioch. She determined on the chance of this to proceed thither. The journey on foot could be made with no great difficulty she knew in four days. Without doubt, failing Paul himself, she would find some of his disciples there. Could she but safely come as far as Misthia on the lonely, little-traveled mountain road, all would then be well, since after she reached the Royal Road from Lystra to Antioch she could doubtless attach herself to some company of travelers. The purse at her belt was fortunately well supplied with Roman coin.

The road led at first through beautiful blossom-

ing gardens and orchards all smiling and peaceful in the June morning. The air without the city wall was pure and bracing; those she met saluted her with curiosity but with marked respect, and by noon when she stopped at a humble cottage to seek refreshment, her courage was well confirmed, and she set out again on her strange, adventurous journey full of heart and hope. The night was spent in another lowly home where she received compassionate hospitality from an elderly pair of country folk, who were touched by her defenseless state and gave her good speed on her second day.

The road had now traversed the plain and pierced the rough and hilly region rising to the west from the vast Lycaonian plain. Looking eastward, beyond the towers and turrets of Iconium Thekla caught her last glimpse of the lofty snow peaks of Hassan Dagh as they rose into the morning blue. With a faint misgiving at her heart as the last familiar landmark vanished from her sight, the girl turned her face resolutely forward, and set herself with her sound young limbs to mount the rugged hills. Again the road descended, thickly wooded on either side. At the foot of the declivity

a little stream ran cheerily, the water clear as crystal. A bird sang with joyous abandon in the thicket just beyond. Thekla bent and drank the pure and sparkling water, casting aside her mantle and bathing brow and cheek with eager delight. There were fresh hoof prints in the soft earth by the water's edge but she gave them no heed. With a bound she was over the brook and on as the road, now little better than a mossy path, led her into the cool still recesses of a wooded dell. She had met no human being since she started, and until now she had not felt the loneliness oppressive, but at this moment the breathless stillness and the deep green shadows which enlosed her filled her with mysterious, shrinking dread. The place was so unearthly still. If only that bird would follow her into this dim valley and sing his blithe heart out for her to hear!

Still she went on, but ever as she went the shadows deepened around her and the sense of dread. The ilex trees on either side the path seemed to bend their branches in a weird unwonted motion; strange outlines appeared through the heavy leafage only to fade again; steps followed

her, and light rustlings ran on before, yet when she turned her head she saw nothing. A sudden terror, of what she did not understand, overtook the maiden, and she ran as if pursued, hardly noting whether she kept the path or not. Then presently as if two insnaring arms had been thrown around her she was caught and nearly thrown to the earth by the stout branches of a blossom-covered bramble. As she bent to release her drapery from the thorns with trembling fingers, the air seemed to prick her face like a hot breath and a nameless sense of some swift approach of deadly peril made her heart almost cease beating. That sound coming nearer, still nearer—whence she could not tell—was it not the sound of hoof beats falling muffled on the mossy ground?

The brambles dropped from her fingers but she did not move forward, rather she clasped her hands, closing her eyes, while under her breath came the words, "*I am not alone.*"

The sound of her own voice broke the spell of terror which had gone far to master the maid.

"Surely my God is in the place, and I knew it not," she whispered. Then, dropping on her

knees and lifting hands of prayer, she cried to Christ the Lord to be her Guide and Guard, and as she prayed the white shield of her chastity like a pure flame interposed between her and that which threatened her, and God's glory fell upon her face.

Then, rising from her knees, Thekla proceeded on her way without haste or tumult, walking with God through the shadows and fearing no evil.

Later, when the sun was high in the heaven and the dews dried from the grass, a man led a horse out from the forest and even to the brook where the maid had paused in the freshness of the morning to quench her thirst. It was Thamyris.

At the narrow ford he stopped, and while his horse bent to drink he stood with wandering looks, his face haggard and ashen gray.

"A man may wrestle with flesh and blood," he muttered, "but against the gods can no man contend."

Then having passed the stream he mounted and rode slowly away in the direction of Iconium.

XII

Friends in Need

EMERGING from the thickly wooded valley the path by which Thekla had been advancing through the hilly region again took on the aspect of a traveled highway.

Trembling now with weariness the maiden sank down upon the flower-starred bank and watched a procession which suddenly swept into sight on a converging road. The train was headed by a small troop of horsemen of a semi-military appearance, their light armor resplendent in the sunshine, gay plumes sweeping from their helmets in the wind. Behind them came a retinue of servants surrounding a closely curtained carriage drawn by white mules. Mechanically Thekla watched the cortege as it wheeled into the road opposite the place where she had stopped to rest, and set forward in the direction which she was about to take. Her interest was awakened by the welcome

perception that her onward way would hereafter be somewhat less unprotected, since some laggard of the lady's retinue might straggle behind; and in any event her course seemed no longer so aloof and remote from the movements of others. Who might the lady be in yonder receding carriage? she questioned, for the close curtains showed that the traveler was a lady and the numbers and accoutrements of the convoy betokened one of highest rank. Plainly they had come from the vast villa which she saw in the distance crowning a low hill. Instantly Thekla recalled the circumstance that in this direction was the summer palace of the Pontic queen, the noble Lady Tryphena, cousin of the great Claudius Cæsar. Thekla knew vaguely that her villa and gardens, famed to be of fabulous beauty, lay to the west of Iconium among the foot hills of Sultan Dagh, but she had not known of their situation more nearly.

Of this noted member of the great Antonian family herself much was rumored through all that part of Phrygia. Many tales were told of her proud and imperious character and of her generous disposition, while some sympathy was pop-

ularly felt with her as a woman little past the prime of life, notable for her power and energy, who had been forced by circumstances to withdraw over early from the administration of public affairs in her kingdom of Pontus.

But now Thekla forgot her passing interest in the Pontic queen. Another traveler was approaching on foot along the road leading from the Roman villa, a man solitary, walking with measured steps and carrying a bulky burden. Thekla little minded, since she felt now no pressing need of protection, to encounter the questions and remarks of passing travelers, rose and pressed forward on her way as rapidly as her shaken strength would permit. The heat of the sun, now nearly at the highest point in the heavens, was fast becoming oppressive, and the road was white with dust.

Thekla presently became aware that her fitful and fluctuating pace would not suffice to keep her long in advance of the unknown man behind her. She could hear the steady, even tread of his feet and the ring of his iron-bound staff, never quickened but never lagging. Ere long he must overtake her. With a little sigh of

weariness, for she was in sore need of food and rest, Thekla stood aside leaning against the wall of a small wayside shrine and drew the enshrouding folds of her white peplos closely about her head and face. In a moment more the man was abreast of her as she stood, an old man she saw with bowed shoulders and furrowed face, all whitened with dust. Surely she knew that face! A second direct look showed her that it was Hierax, the slave of her neighbor in Iconium, the silversmith. With a cry of irresistible thanksgiving Thekla called him aloud by name, then burst into a fit of weeping.

A few moments sufficed to make known to each the circumstances and condition of the other. The family of Onesiphoros were as they had been now for weeks in hiding in a tomb on the road down which Thekla had seen Hierax come.

"And Paul the Messenger?"

"He is with us."

"I knew it!" cried the maiden with overflowing joy, and as she spoke she caught from the hand of Hierax the blue cloak which he carried folded in a square bundle. "I knew when I saw

it close at hand the cloak which I had seen him wear," and her tears fell afresh upon its folds. She clung with childish joy to the cloak, pressing her cheek against it, smoothing it reverently with her hand, then clasping it against her heart as if it were something sacred and precious beyond expression.

Hierax watched her the while, marveling greatly that the proud and delicate maiden, the high-born daughter of the haughty Theokleia, in her flower-like grace and beauty could be transported with such a rapture of reverence for the poor, worn cloak of the hunted and hated wanderer, Paul.

"And whither art thou now bound, good Hierax?" asked the maiden, looking up and dashing the shining tears from her face as she met his honest eyes fixed upon her.

The old slave drew his long upper lip down with a quaint smile. Lifting his eyebrows he said:

"Your worship, I was in good truth on my way into that village yonder to sell the cloak of my lord at his bidding for the food of which we stand sorely in need."

"Ah, I understand; and you perceive that you

can no longer proceed in this undertaking. Quite right, my good Hierax. This cloak can never be sold to buy bread with my good will. Leave it with me ; I will use it for a pillow in the shade of that oak tree yonder and so rest my limbs which ache sharply. In the meanwhile thou shalt take my purse," and she placed a long bag of silver links, heavy with coin, in the slave's hand, " and go on thy way. Buy food for me also, Hierax. I will await thy coming under that oak tree. Then in good time thou wilt return and under thy guidance I will go to my master, Paul ; also to thy master, ever my kind, fatherly friend, and to his gentle wife Damodice. With them I shall be safe, and can find all for which I have left Iconium."

XIII

Learning More Perfectly

IN the narrow chamber of the cavern tomb hewn out in the cliff wall, upon a heap of fragrant grass covered by her mantle, the Iconian maiden lay asleep. In the larger adjoining chamber, the chief one of the wayside tomb in which the family of Onesiphoros had taken refuge, the silversmith, his wife, and son still slept. At the doorway of the smaller cell, from which the stone slab had been moved aside for the admission of light and air, stood Paul the Messenger in the early morning.

"Arise, little daughter."

Surely that was his voice, the voice which would have stirred her heart by its mysterious power had she lain in this selfsame tomb bound by death itself! Instantly Thekla leaped to her feet, dashing the dark hair back from her face. Yes, against the oblong space of dim-gray light stood in silhouette the strong figure with the bent shoul-

ders, the massive head, the image which nothing could obliterate from her memory. Emerging from the gloom of the rocky cavern Thekla stepped out into the pure air, the dawn wind fragrant with wild roses blowing freshly in her face as she came. A lark was singing in the wide fields beyond the road. With timid reverence Thekla lifted her eyes to Paul's face.

"Daughter, be of good cheer," he said in a strong energizing tone and smiled upon her with fatherly kindness. "Thou hast fought a good fight, thou hast endured hardness, and wilt to the end right manfully. The grace of our Lord is with thee. Hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown."

"But thou, my father, thou hast thy staff in hand. Art thou about to leave us, and me who have had but one short day in thy presence? O abide yet another day that I may sit at thy feet and learn the way of God more perfectly."

"Nay, little daughter, I must return whence I came. I have not yet given my message to them of Iconium save only to the house of Onesiphoros. It has taken many weeks for me to recover under

the kind care of Damodice from the sufferings which followed the stripes given me by the magistrate's order. Now at last I am able to return and discharge my duty in Iconium. There are needy souls waiting for my message. Thou hast already received it. I go, but thou shalt tarry here and rest and gather strength for thy onward journey. This much is clear: thou canst not return to Iconium."

"Nay," murmured the maiden sorrowfully, "if I were known some grievous ill would come upon me, since the love of those who once loved me has been turned to cruel hate. But O my master, suffer me to disguise myself, to cut short my hair, and follow thee as thy servant. I will care for thy comfort, run thy errands, do thy bidding like a willing slave and count it highest joy."

Her cheeks grew rosy red, her eyes shone with youthful ardor.

"See, I can alter the fashion of my tunic, girding it high, so making it with little pains to the likeness of a boy's garment. No one would guess me to be a maid; no one, even in Iconium, would discern in thy slender boyish

slave the Lady Thekla, daughter of the proud house of Theokleia."

The bright challenge of appeal in her face met the response of a grave smile in the eyes of Paul and a motion of one hand deprecated further urgency.

"It may not be," he said gently but with the note of authority from which there is no appeal. The generous devotion, the pure affection of this young girl were sweet indeed to the lonely heart of the great apostle, but his vocation forbade that he should taste their sweetness further than as a draught from a cooling spring by the wayside on his rugged journey, a touch of balm to the bruised and aching human spirit whose yearning must never conquer his supreme purpose.

"Then, dear master," said Thekla with deep humility, peceiving the distance which lay between them and must so lie forever, "grant me but one wish, the deepest my heart holds, and I will ask thee no more and seek no longer to detain thee. It is for this in truth I have followed thee all this dangerous way."

"What is thy wish, Thekla?"

"I believe in Jesus Christ, thy Lord and mine, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead. I wish to confess him as my Lord. Wilt thou let me go with thee so far on thy backward way as to the stream at the meeting of the roads yonder and there give me baptism? Then I will go on my way how lonely soever it may be, rejoicing.

As she spoke, Thekla had involuntarily sunk upon her knees and lifted her clasped hands pleadingly before her, her eyes fixed upon the gravely musing face of Paul.

For a moment he made no reply. Then, taking the small, suppliant hands between both his own and shedding into her eyes a strange radiance full of pathos, pity, and tenderness, he spoke:

"My daughter, thou shalt confess our Lord Christ, for thou art worthy. Thou shalt receive baptism into the likeness of his death and of his resurrection. Doubt this not at all. But at my hands canst thou not receive it, lest any should say that thou wert baptized in the name of Paul or for his sake; nay, for the workings of our hearts are exceeding subtle and past our own control full

often, lest thou thyself shouldst think of him who baptized thee rather than of the Great Name into which thou shalt be baptized. Let it be by other hands than Paul's, my child. For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servant for Jesus' sake."

As he so spake he laid his hand in blessing on her drooping head and before both their eyes lay the mist of tears.

"And now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant thee to be filled with all spiritual grace and benediction. Go thy way. May the Lord bless thee and keep thee, may he lift up the light of his countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

Down the long road alone, staff in hand, eastward toward the rising sun whose rays ran forth to meet him, the lonely wanderer passed on his dauntless, perilous way. And the sun's rays which touched his rugged figure gilded the form of the maiden who stood against the rock-hewn pillar of the ancient tomb and watched with wistful eyes the one whose face she should see no more. But the tears had vanished from Thekla's

face, and all the yearning, tumultuous longing from her breast.

Paul she would see no more, but Christ the Lord was in her heart. Love, power, and courage awoke within her and filled her as with a new enduement from on high.

XIV

The Pagan Priest

THE Phrygian city of Antioch was at this time a Roman colonia and the center of the political life of southern Galatia. Under Claudius Cæsar the work of pacification of these provinces was carried on with energy and success and Antioch had attained the height of its power and influence

The first week in June in the year 50 was one of great rejoicing and celebration in the city by reason of the visit of the Roman governor of Galatia, Flavius. All the city was alive to do homage to the occasion and make high festival in honor of the great Roman governor, in whom they could see the actual and direct representative of the great Cæsar himself whom they worshiped as a demi-god. Great political significance was attached to this visit both from the Roman and provincial point of view as strengthening the prestige of the one and the loyalty of the other.

Every day of the week, now half through its course, was signalized by brilliant processions and games in the city stadium. The crown and climax of all was to be a venatio, or battle of wild beasts, on the last day of the week. This was to be the great manifestation of liberality and public spirit of the high priest of the province, Alexander, himself a resident of Antioch, and the organizer of all the week's festivities.

It was the fifth festival day and in midmorning the procession was in motion, moving slowly through the city streets in the direction of the stadium, growing ever in numbers and in dignity as representatives of the great guilds and aristocratic families joined the ranks, all ready to hold high carnival.

At the head of the procession clad in a white chlamys stiff with gold embroidery and thickly encrusted with gems, his priestly crown upon his head, walked Alexander himself followed by a brilliant train of attendants.

In the prime of life, singularly handsome, and of ostentatious authority of bearing, Alexander was at this hour elated almost to intoxication with

a sense of triumph and success. Thus far all had gone well with his plans; the governor had condescended to be easily pleased and had bestowed most flattering acknowledgments upon all the efforts made to interest and entertain him; the Pontic queen, the Dowager Tryphena, had herself condescended to grace each day's festivity by her personal presence, and her court had lent its highest lustre, her person its highest distinction, to the scene. A spirit of mirth and revelry, triumph and license was rising ever to a higher point with each new day. Instead of weariness and satiety the populace only waxed more eager, more enthusiastic. As Alexander walked forward his eye following the gay groups which continually joined the ranks of his company, a sense of power mounted like a passion within him. All these other dignitaries were outsiders, aliens, he alone stood for the city itself. He knew himself its favorite; for the moment he was the idol of the mob; did he not furnish it with its choicest delectation? Did not all men look to him now, awaiting his nod and beckoning, watching his words? To some outsider, looking coldly on the wanton,

excited mob, he might have seemed a lord of misrule, but to himself he seemed for the moment like a Cæsar clad in a brave show of authority.

As they neared the city's southern gate Alexander called for a halt, and, mounting a small portable rostrum carried by his servants, he addressed the gathering crowd with much rhetorical flourish. The pith of his speech was that the procession should here divide, the greater part moving on directly to the stadium, where foot races and wrestling were to be the day's amusement, while he with his own band of attendants would take the other route and call for the governor, the worthy Flavius, and the Lady Tryphena with their retinues. The winter palace of the latter and the house temporarily occupied by the former chanced to be nearly adjoining.

With deafening shouts of acclamation the procession broke up and reformed for the purpose indicated, the air filled with thrilling bursts of music and with a mist of roses flung in handfuls back and forth by the bands of laughing youths and bright-eyed maidens.

Alexander descended from his temporary post

of elevation and watched the scene with evident enjoyment, nodding and laughing to the maidens, who blushed and became greatly excited at his slightest notice. Suddenly the priest's eye was caught and chained by the approach of a figure of another sort from the flower-crowned dancing girls of his train.

Who might this strange maiden be who, just entering the city gate, approached the tumultuous gayety with unconscious face and a mien so foreign? Surely never had he seen a face of such exquisite beauty! The maid was pale, to be sure, but her dark, lambent eyes looked but so much the larger for the lustrous whiteness of her skin. On her brow was a marvelous calm and purity and on her lips a gentleness like that of a timid, wistful child.

It was Thekla, who had just parted from Hierax without the gate, and who now entered Antioch intent upon finding some Christian family of whose residence and welcome of herself Onesiphoros had given her full assurance. Not wishing to mingle in the wild gayety of the thronging street, she stood irresolute, seeking some path by which to make

her way through the crowd into the quiet and almost deserted regions beyond. Of the priest's own presence Thekla was unaware, having failed to mark him in the changing confusion of all about her.

Suddenly, then, as she was moving onward with timid, tentative steps, uncertain how to proceed, she felt a man's strong arm thrown around her body, she was drawn close in a warm, clinging embrace, and a man's lips were pressed passionately, wantonly upon her cheek, and in her ear the words were hotly whispered,

"Thou shalt be mine own, fair stranger. Fear nothing. My protection is assured unto thee. Come with me now and join the other maidens of my train. Later I will lead thee to my house."

While he spoke these words Thekla in an agony of terror cried aloud for release, for defense. "Whoever thou art, release me," she begged. "Respect my right as stranger, as guest in your city whose walls I saw never until this day. I am of a noble family of Iconium. I claim protection from such approach as this, for I travel alone in the service of my God. Let me go my way. It is all I ask."

"'Arrest this demented witch. Tie her hands.'"

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"Nay, loveliest one. That is all too much to ask. Know that I am Alexander, who preside over all this festivity. In entering these gates thou hast become my subject and must submit to my will. That will," and his voice sank to a whisper of sudden intensity in her ear, "that will is to make thee mine, sweet prisoner. Never can I let thee go. Thy breath is like the lily's fragrance, thy cheek like its chalice," and again he covered her cheek with his hot kisses.

"Oh, my master! Oh, Paul! Would thou wert here!" cried the struggling maiden in wild despair. Then suddenly, her Phrygian blood fired with a fury of horror and loathing, she tore the priestly tiara from the brow bent above her and dashed it to the pavement. Then, her frenzy of indignant resistance mounting yet higher, she seized the jeweled folds of his chlamys and tore it in strips, while her eyes flashed white fire in his face

Gasping with amazement and mortification, Alexander released the girl and signed to his attendants to come forward. "Arrest this demented witch. Tie her hands lest they tear your very eyes out. Lead her after me to the stadium. She

shall be judged for this sacrilege by the governor himself."

Then, allowing the attendants to replace the crown upon his head and to conceal so far as might be the disorder of his garments, Alexander placed himself anew at the head of the procession. In vain he sought to recover his former pompous authority of bearing, and a malignant glance at Thekla as he passed her betrayed his sense of bitter mortification.

Her passion of fury spent, the maid had grown deathly pale and her whole frame shook as she was now led forward, taunts and reproaches, cries of "Sacrilege!" and "Treason!" pouring upon her in volleys from all sides, her hands tied with a harsh cord behind her back, her beautiful face exposed to the curiosity and contempt of the excited mob.

XV

Guilty of Sacrilege

THE procession, its gayety hushed by a more breathless and eager excitement, the instinctive thirst for a veritable sensation all alive, swept on at a rapid pace to the palace of the governor. Here in the spacious open court, surrounded by a pillared portico or colonnade on three sides they found the great Roman magnate with his train already awaiting their advent. With darkened brow and eyes fiery with mortified pride and baffled purpose Alexander hastened before his chief and made his obeisance.

"And my fair and royal neighbor the Lady Tryphena has joined us also, good Alexander," said the governor, "that we might the less delay the day's sports, since the hour already waxes late."

Flavius bowed with a gesture of homage in the direction of a stately lady in magnificent costume who with a small retinue stood at a slight remove

within the shadow of the porch. Alexander saluted her with humble reverence. The lady received his obeisance coldly and remarked:

"How chances it, sir, that you wear so sorry an aspect on so fair a day? Surely your spirits are not of the best this morning to judge by your stormy brow and the smile you seem at such pains to summon."

"In good truth, my Lady Tryphena, I have somewhat whereof to complain."

Turning then to the governor, in a voice which trembled with anger, the priest described the act of sacrilege just committed by the abandoned creature to whom he had sought in his bounty to show a kindness, fully warranted by her appearance in the streets of the city unattended.

Flavius listened attentively. The Roman queen, drawing nearer, manifested equal interest and at the close of the recital she said lightly to the governor:

"Were it not well, my lord, to let the damsel witness for herself in the matter?"

The governor assented with marked respect.

"Let the maid come forward," he said quietly. "We will hear what she can say for herself.

Speak, damsel," he added with severity as Thekla white and trembling was led forward and stood with drooping head before him. "Is it true that thou hast committed this atrocious sacrilege upon the person of Cæsar's priest—tearing his garments, dashing from his head the sacred crown?"

"It is true, my lord," Thekla's lips moved with difficulty to frame the words.

"Art thou aware that thy act constitutes a dangerous crime and one punishable by death?"

Thekla bent her head lower yet but spoke no word.

The governor knit his brows. At his elbow stood Alexander, his face full of vindictive, sensual excitement, fierce with the thirst of revenge.

"Seest thou, my lord," he said in an undertone, drawing Flavius aside, "how this crime may by good wit be turned to high advantage? Such an indignity to Cæsar's high priest can be fitly punished only by utmost severity else the populace will be led to set at naught the Roman authority and the august name. The crime furthermore was committed against me and if it be thy pleasure I will name the punishment."

"Very well, I will hear thee."

"Give the maiden into my keeping and on the last day of the festival, two days hence, I will produce her in the stadium to suffer the death sentence —in the venatio. The effect will be prodigious."

The Roman started with an involuntary impulse of recoil.

"The damsel is plainly of noble birth, delicately nurtured, a stranger, a creature of innocent aspect and forlorn," he murmured.

"Verily; yet is she on her own admission worthy of death," interposed Alexander. "The death I name will be a lesson most impressive of the immutability of Roman law and its just severity."

He turned as he spoke with an air of great dignity and profound impressiveness and yet as one who knows his place and will not interfere beyond his privilege.

By this time the great court was filled with the curious and excited holiday throng, among whom the women pushed their way forward to catch glimpses of the prisoner, their faces full of disapproval in which awe and compassion had yet a place.

"A young thing." "A maid of high degree, plainly." "She must be properly punished, the wanton," and such like exclamations were passed from lip to lip.

Once only Thekla lifted her eyes, and in doing so she fixed them full upon the cold, beautiful face of the Pontic queen who was gazing upon her thus far in silence, apparently unmoved. The appeal in the maiden's eyes pierced the heart of the Roman matron. It was not the appeal for pity, for compassion, for release, but in a flash aside at the heated, handsome face of Alexander it cried for the protection of a maiden's honor against the secret purpose and passion of the priest.

"I can die," the look said, "but I cannot be defiled."

A swift involuntary gesture of Tryphena's hand seemed to offer pledge of her response. Thekla's eyes fell again and she stood as before, white and motionless. The governor had now reached a decision. He turned back and again confronted Thekla with the question.

"Thou dost not deny that thou art guilty of sacrilege?"

"I do not deny it."

"Then I render this sentence: Thou shalt be sent to prison under guard of the priest Alexander, whose sacred person thou hast assaulted, and whose insignia thou hast despoiled. To-morrow at this hour thou shalt appear in the stadium when the procession enters, and shalt there stand with thy sentence inscribed on a tablet beside thee, that all may know and take warning from thy offense. Thou shalt thereafter be remanded to the care of the jailer, and on the following day thou shalt again be brought to the stadium, and there, in the venatio which is appointed for that day, thou shalt suffer death."

When the last word was spoken Thekla lifted her head as if she had now no more to fear.

"I yield to your will, my lord," she said humbly. "I can die to atone for my fault, though it was committed in fulfillment of a vow to my God." Then a swift change brought the look of piteous appeal and dread. "But I fear—I fear to live," she cried with indescribable pathos.

Again, as she broke off, Thekla's eyes sought the face of the Pontic queen.

Tryphena took a step forward, her face a shade paler than before.

From the assembled crowd cries broke forth of pity and horror. The Roman gladiatorial customs were little known in these remote barbarian provinces.

"A cruel judgment!" "An impious judgment!" sounded here and there from the lips of the women. Some even wept aloud, while others stared in voiceless dismay at the summary and awful sentence.

"My lord."

The governor turned and faced the Lady Tryphena.

"Madame, your pleasure."

There was a note of warning in his voice, despite his deference to the lady's royal rank. No frustration of justice and authority might now be undertaken through feminine softness and compassion.

"Your sentence is in accord with the crime of this unknown damsel, and far let it be from me to interfere in her behalf, save in one thing. I have this to crave of your worship. She is a stranger

of gentle birth, coming hither to fulfill a vow to the god, and it is but reasonable that her person should be protected until she suffer death. Hardly could this be were she committed to the common prison. Permit me, my lord, to take the damsel, therefore, into my own house for these two days, with the pledge that she shall appear in the stadium at the set time, both to-morrow and the day following in fulfillment of her sentence."

The governor, plainly relieved that the proud Antonian dame made no more difficult demand upon him, glanced from her to the accused maiden. Thekla's large eyes were fixed upon the queen, her lips were parted, her breath came in quick gasps. Upon the issue of the illustrious lady's plea the maiden's very soul seemed to depend. From the crowd cries of sympathy and approval for the queen's request arose tumultuously, cries in which women's voices predominated with shrill, piercing clamor.

The governor glanced aside to the face of the high priest Alexander. Something of savage and sinister purpose beneath the smooth and handsome features seemed to decide the matter. With

graceful deference Flavius indicated his consent to the lady's very gentle and natural request. Then, cutting short the cheers of the people with a curt, authoritative gesture, he signed to his attendants that they clear the court and convey the prisoner to the palace of the Pontic queen, that the day's festival might proceed.

The prisoner had thrown herself on the pavement before her royal custodian, her lips pressed to the hem of her robe.

XVI

The Pontic Queen

IN the portico of her Antioch winter palace the Lady Tryphena was pacing restlessly to and fro. Her face, usually reserved and impassive in its expression, was touched to warmth and softened by some inner excitement which plainly carried her beyond the range of her wonted thoughts and emotions.

Belonging to the imperial family of Rome, accustomed through all her earlier years to undisputed power as queen in her own right of Pontus, and queen consort of Thrace, the proud mother of three kings moreover, and by her natural endowment full of energy and the love of power, Tryphena, now past her early prime, had within the last few years undergone an experience at once humiliating and embittering. During the minority of her son Polemon, she had reigned supreme in Pontus, and had looked forward to some continuance of this influence as queen dowager of the

realm after the accession of her son to the throne. The disposition of Polemon, vain, sensitive, and jealous of interference had soon disappointed this anticipation, and a situation of constant uneasiness and friction had been produced in the realm. With strong common sense and native dignity the royal widow promptly resolved to cut short these conditions, and leaving Pontus wholly to Polemon she had withdrawn a few years previous to her private estates. Estranged or separated from her sons, bereft by death of her consort and of her only daughter, shorn of her kingdom, facing an old age barren and lonely, and a state gilded by but a faint reflex of her earlier power, Tryphena felt herself a queen dispossessed and a mother left childless. She had borne her pain in silence and faced the world loftily and with intense reserve.

The people at large looked up to her with reverent admiration as the embodiment of queenly magnificence, but there were long nights of secret conflict and sorrow in which the queen's hair had grown white, for her heart ceased not to cry out in its yearning for the husband and the daughter who were dead and the sons who were as dead to her.

She had come to Antioch with her retinue and household servants at this time, caring little for the celebration with which the visit of the governor was to be signalized, but driven by a restless craving for change and interruption to her brooding loneliness. The endless games and noisy processions were weariness to her both in flesh and spirit. The high priest Alexander had impressed her as little better than a court buffoon, and the governor Flavius, while superior to herself in the administrative power and authority of which she was now destitute, was yet in rank so far beneath her as to belong in another social world.

The only ripple of interest in the whole week's course for her had been given by the incident of the arrest and sentence for sacrilege of the Iconian maiden Thekla, on the previous day. All the womanhood of the queen had been enlisted for the protection of the friendless stranger from the coarse brutality of the common prison, and from the yet more dreaded guardianship of Alexander. She had extended to Thekla the protection of her rank and her house, and having thus voluntarily constituted herself the custodian of a convicted

criminal she had found a singular interest in the novel situation. Her prisoner should be kindly, compassionately treated, served as became her rank and gentle breeding and her guest-right, while at the same time Tryphena, strong in her disapproval of the act which had led to Thekla's arrest, would not for a moment relax her own attitude of coldness, reserve, and personal aloofness.

It was nearly noon. Fully three hours since Thekla had been led away by a company of armed men to be taken to the stadium there to form part of the ostentatious display which should prefigure the morrow's great spectacle. These three hours had seemed endless to Tryphena. A strange dread of imminent harm to her defenseless charge had finally overmastered her despite her knowledge that the unknown maiden had at best but twenty-four hours more of life left her. For as she walked rapidly in ever augmenting agitation behind the sculptured pillars of the portico there seemed constantly before the queen the slight figure of the young girl as she had gone out thence in her white garments. She could not banish from her vision the great, solemn eyes lifted to her own

below the pure, untroubled brow, the childlike sweetness of the mouth with the pathos of its grateful, timid smile.

To have sent that gentle, helpless creature forth alone among the soldiery to face the brutal jeers of the mob in the stadium suddenly seemed to the queen an act of heartless cruelty. Who could tell what had befallen her? For a moment she was minded to call for her carriage and go out at once herself to the stadium even yet. Surely they should have brought the child back an hour since. Then she heard swift steps, and a young slave, Dion, the swiftest runner of her attendants, darted through the open gateway of the court.

The queen called him to her.

"What has happened?" she cried imperiously. "Is the maiden safe? Tell me all."

"Yes, madam. She will be here ere long. The procession has already left the stadium and I started on before to announce to you the maid's return."

"Was she evil entreated by the mob?—insulted? Did her courage fail?"

"Nay, majesty. I think she knew not what

went forward, so still she stood and with so strange a look upon her face as one whose spirit dwells afar."

"Where, Dion, did she stand? O tell me. Did they bring the lioness into the arena? Did the maiden see her?"

Tryphena had grown white and her breath came in quivering gasps.

"Yes, majesty. The lioness was brought—it is but an hour since—in her cage and placed in the central portion of the stadium, where all could plainly see her, for the cage was made wholly of iron bars well apart but covered above with strong boards."

"And Thekla—speak quickly, boy. What do I care for the cage?"

"I made mention of its form that you might the better understand what followed, madam. When the cage had been set in its place, the lioness walking with rapid tread and short, swift turns to and fro in it, the lady was led out between the lanistae and lifted to the top of it, and there for the space of a half-hour she stood, the sun beating down upon her head and the eyes of all men fixed upon her."

"What was the feeling in the crowd? Couldst thou mark it?"

"Chiefly of curiosity, I thought, then of pity until the tablet caught the people's eye with the inscription showing the crime."

"*Sacrilega?*"

"The same, majesty. The high priest called upon all to take good heed to the inscription and mark what punishment would come upon such as blasphemed and violated the sacred person of Cæsar's priest. Then hisses and cries of 'Sacrilege!' and 'Treason!' were started here and there, but methought there was little heart in them."

"And the maiden herself? Thou sayest she took scant heed of what was said and done."

"Yea, verily. She grew whiter and ever whiter until her face was as her robes and her appearance was like the statue of some goddess rather than like the living form of mortal maid. But as I watched her I saw not that she either trembled or wept or sought for mercy or release. Once, your majesty, the lady smiled."

Tryphena gave an exclamation of wonder.

"It was on this wise. She had placed one foot

a step forward so that it came near the edge of the boards whereon she stood. The beast below within the cage had been stretching up her head and sniffing about above her. Thus she soon discovered the white, bare foot and began licking it, stretching her tongue between the bars to reach it. Some thought there was danger from her teeth, which gleamed white and terrible so near the damsel's tender flesh, but it was then, and, so far as I saw, then only that the lady lifted her eyes, and it was then that she smiled. Her look seemed to say, 'Fear not, good people. The creature will not harm me. Her time is not yet come.' Calmer she was than ever I could dream it possible for mortal maid. Madam, to me it seemeth that some god dwells within her or is breathing upon her."

There was a noise then in the street beyond and the boy exclaimed:

"Your majesty, they are bringing the Lady Thekla home!"

"The gods be praised!" murmured the queen.

LOUIE ELLIOTT

XVII

A Mother's Passion

THE earliest sunrise rays had but touched the palace roof when Tryphena awoke, groaning heavily, from a troubled sleep and found the tears streaming down her cheeks. With a sense of incommunicable woe, of speechless sorrow mingling with an emotion yet tenderer, the queen rose hastily, clad herself in the first garments which came to her hand, hardly seeing what she did for blinding tears, and then with swift steps proceeded to the chamber which had been given to the maiden prisoner, entering it noiselessly.

The room was large and beautiful, rich with tapestries and carving, its chairs and couches of wrought silver and ivory. The light and air of the June dawn came in at the open windows, and on the white bed, in the pure peace of a child's untroubled slumber lay Thekla, her dark hair falling over the pillow, her hands folded across her breast.

For a long moment the widowed queen stood at a slight distance and watched the maiden as she thus slept, with the calm brow and peace upon her lips. Then swept by a sudden rush of irresistible emotion, she flung herself upon her knees beside the bed, throwing her arms around the slender girlish form with a mother's yearning tenderness, and sobbing under her breath:

"My child! my daughter!" Like a torrent flowed her tears and choked her utterance, as she murmured the broken exclamations, "Thou art mine—mine own child—yet mine for but this single day. Ye gods be merciful—look upon a mother's thrice broken heart! Be pitiful!"

Conscious at last of the voice and the clinging embraces of the weeping queen, Thekla's lips parted in a smile of exquisite gentleness, and she murmured drowsily.

"Am I then at home?—*mother!*" With that word uttered with poignant eagerness she instantly became awake, and profoundly startled, sprang up, slipping to the edge of the bed and looking with wide bewildered vision at the lady who still knelt before her.

The word "mother" on the lips of her gentle prisoner touched Tryphena to an access of feeling in which joy and sorrow met and struggled for supremacy.

"O call me again 'mother,' sweet Thekla. Let me hear the tenderest name we women know from thy lips, for I *am* thy mother, my child, my darling. Thou hast been sent unto me to bring one last ray of love into my lonely heart, my cold and friendless and loveless life."

Drawing the stately lady to a place beside her, Thekla lifted her eyes fully to her face in a look eloquent of the pathos of love, of pity, and of grateful response.

"Mother," she whispered solemnly, while large tears dropped slowly from her eyes. "I have no mother besides."

"And I no child. Listen precious one, while I tell thee how thou hast been changed from my unknown prisoner to my heart's dear daughter. Just before I awoke this morning, as I lay in my bed in the chamber yonder, I saw approaching me my fair young daughter Antonia, whom I lost many years ago in just thy years of radiant maidenhood.

It may have been a dream, but no dream has ever visited me of such enthralling reality. And yet I felt no fear as the dear vision came nearer, but noted her very robes, that they were such as I had myself wrought of finest silk for her pleasure in the happy time when we dwelt together in our own sunlit palace in Pontus. Then, when with eyes full upon me but without a smile, Antonia had come even to my side, I thought she stretched forth her right hand and laid it upon my heart. I felt the pressure there and something tightened around my heart and gave me sharp pangs of anguish. Then she spoke and said 'Mother, thy heart is empty. Thy heart is cold. No longer must thou remain childless and alone. A child is given thee in my place, even the holy maid Thekla, whom thou hast received under thy roof as a prisoner. Let her be to thee as blood of blood and flesh of flesh, thy very own. Then shall thy heart be no longer empty and no longer cold.' Then for the first time she smiled upon me, but when I would have gathered her to my breast with all my mother's love and longing she was gone, and I wept until I woke."

With the last words the lady's tears and sobs broke out afresh with overwhelming passion.

"And wilt thou too vanish from my eyes and leave them only tears, from my arms and leave them nothingness, from my heart and leave it emptiness?"

Again she sank upon her knees, this time at Thekla's very feet, and folding the lovely limbs of the maiden in her white arms with a gesture magnificently maternal, she bathed them with her tears the while she moaned,

"And those tender limbs—this delicate frame—this pure and virgin body—shall I see it rolled in dust and blood a few hours hence? ye gods!" and Tryphena's frame shook with the paroxysm of her strong agony, for over the frenzy of her grief and terror she was now no longer master.

Her face white and cold as marble, Thekla bent over the proud head now brought so low, caressing the lady's face and hair with gentlest touches, murmuring in her ear again and again the one word "mother," the word of supreme significance to them both in that supreme hour.

In brief space Tryphena then won back her self-

control; her moaning ceased and calmness followed. She rose and stood erect lifting her head with the majestic firmness of submission to the inevitable.

"Come, sweetest daughter," she said, and her lips did not tremble, as she drew the maiden within the shelter of her embrace. "Come. Never must it be said that the kinswoman of Cæsar has pleaded to break Cæsar's law. Thy mother will array thee for thy going forth unto death as befits the daughter of a Roman queen."

XVIII

Arrayed for the Ordeal

AND thou dost not repent thee of thy deed, my child, thy act of assault upon the person of the high priest?"

Tryphena asked the question, her voice trembling in spite of all her efforts as she bent to fasten around Thekla's waist a jeweled girdle. At a short distance attendant maidens stood holding caskets of jewels and embroidered silken garments, and wept bitterly as they stood.

Two hours had passed and the day was advancing to its crisis.

"Nay, my mother. The man's touch was pollution. Far rather would I meet the wild beasts of the venatio than submit to his embraces. Well I know that to use such violence was rude and unmaidenly; nevertheless it saved me in that hour when naught else could have availed."

"Yes, my Thekla, but saved thee but for an end yet more terrible."

"Ah, say not so! Death rather than defilement. I have pledged myself, body, soul, and spirit to the Holy One of God, my Saviour. Death will be union with him, my mother, therefore I fear it not. And yet—how can death claim me so quickly since not yet have I received baptism into the death of my Lord, and the Spirit witnessed that I should come to Antioch, here to receive my baptism, as Paul my master said, from other hands than his?"

Thekla became silent, lost in troubled musing.

Tryphena gazed perplexed at the maiden whose thoughts were so foreign to her own and whose gentle quietude was but the more striking beside the uncontrolled grief of the attendants and her own tumultuous agitation, ill concealed by a rigid external calm.

Bathed and anointed and clothed as a princess for her bridal, Thekla was now, at the bidding of Tryphena, standing to receive from her own hands the jewels and outer garments of royal splendor arrayed in which it was her will that the maiden should appear in the stadium. Far better would it have suited Thekla's lowly mind in that final

hour, bent upon death and eternity, to have spent it upon her knees alone in humble prayer for the divine upholding, but she could not resist this last manifestation of the brief mother passion of the widowed and childless woman who had so tenderly received her.

The queen clasped the last ornament, a light coronal of glittering gems confining the veil which flowed over the dark hair, while her maidens checked their sobs and held their breath at the vision of unearthly loveliness before them. At the moment steps approached the open door.

"It is Dion, madam," murmured an attendant.

"Let him enter," said the queen pressing her hand upon her throbbing heart and drawing her breath quicker. Well she knew what he had come to announce.

"Your majesty," said the slave in a low voice, "the high priest is at the door. He has come himself to give the Lady Thekla escort and convoy to the stadium."

A quick flush rose to Thekla's cheeks. Involuntarily she clasped her hands in an unconscious gesture of distress. No glance or motion

of the maid's could escape the maternal eye of Tryphena.

"Is the high priest unattended?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"Return then and tell him that I thank him for his condescension, but I will deliver up my prisoner only to the usual escort. Let him send four quaternions of soldiers to accompany the Lady Thekla if he wish her to appear in the stadium. Not otherwise can she leave the protection of my house."

Dion turned and hastened away in silence to do his lady's bidding. Thekla fixed upon her face a look of swift and speechless gratitude.

"Would that I could go with thee every step of the way, my child," Tryphena murmured half to herself, "walking through the streets by thy side between the soldiers of the guard, but it may not be. Nevertheless thou wilt find thy mother in the stadium before thee. No breath of thine to-day shall be breathed alone. No agony shall be suffered by thee that I shall not suffer with thee."

Thekla knelt then and covered the hand of the queen with kisses.

"My mother," she murmured between fast falling tears.

"Thy mother even to the end," said the queen.

Then they all left the maiden at her humble entreaty, and being alone she prayed and the strength of God was vouchsafed her.

XIX

In the Arena

THE great amphitheatre, roofed only by the cloudless blue of the summer sky, was filled with an unbroken mass of humanity, from the level of the sand-strewn arena to the summit of the high encircling wall. Midway the length of the ellipse the mounting galleries were broken by an elevated tribunal over which gilded columns sustained a richly wrought canopy. Surmounting the capital of each column the Roman eagles flashed in the sun. In the central, throne-like seat of this structure the governor Flavius was seated, surrounded by a brilliant company of his immediate officials. At his left hand sat Alexander, the high priest of Cæsar, his handsome face darkened by a sullen frown. The seat at the right of Flavius remained still vacant, and behind it standing room was reserved for the retinue of Queen Tryphena whose appearance was momentarily ex-

pected. Below the tribunal, confined within narrow enclosing walls ran a candida fossa, a mountain stream, clear and cold, swift and full of refreshing suggestion. Over the stream lay a footbridge beyond which under the tribunal floor a double arch closed by iron gates led into the subterranean passages below the level of the podium.

The mood of the enormous assembly was of tense excitement and expectation. In the two days since the Iconian maiden had first appeared in the streets of Antioch her person, her crime, her condemnation, her approaching death, had been the all-absorbing themes in the homes and haunts of the citizens. The stranger was young, well-born, beautiful, a virgin self-dedicated to the service of the god; her crime, self-confessed though it was, had been committed in the defense of her honor; the most illustrious lady in the land, even Queen Tryphena, had become her jailer and her guardian. And now in all the bloom of her beauty and innocence this delicately nurtured maiden was to be given to the mercy of wild beasts, to meet a death of incredible horror.

Up to this period, the early age of the Anto-

nines, among these Græco-Roman provincial people, the punishment by death of human beings in the games of the arena had been witnessed but rarely, and only in the case of coarse and brutal desperadoes, never of women. The popular sympathy therefore was strongly aroused and a noisy sort of compassion was voiced on every side. In Rome such an event as the sentence of Thekla would scarcely have provoked remark, for in Rome at this time the appearance of female gladiators was frequent and often voluntary, and was welcomed as a pleasing stimulus to the sated taste for sensation of the fashionable world. But Phrygia was far from Rome and still "barbarian."

But while the emotions of pity and horror had been widely stirred in the intervening days and indignation, especially among the women of Antioch, had been loud against Flavius and Alexander, at this hour all gentler feelings were lost for the fickle crowd in the savage lust for excitement, the morbid craving for strong and ever stronger spectacular sensation. Even pity, sympathy, the luxury of tears, the overflow of emotion, were but accessories to the supreme climax in the day's

drama, toward which all were now looking with a fever of expectation.

For Alexander had planned the programme of this last day of festival with unerring skill. Nothing had been spared to make this spectacle, the climax of the week, a pageant of powerful attraction to the populace, and to arouse at the same time their coarser passions.

The vast crowd with its wild contagion of enthusiasm had been captivated anew by the magnificent scene presented in the freshly decorated stadium, by the superb costumes of the Roman ladies accompanying the court of the governor, by fresh processions of novel and striking character and imposing military display, while the latent fierceness of their temper had been aroused and stimulated and their finer sensibilities blunted by several hours of gladiatorial combats between convicted outlaws, trained for the purpose, and by the brutalities of the venatio, or battle of the beasts.

But all the while, each in a separate cage near opposite ends of the arena, open to the eyes of all the spectators, the two chief ornaments of the venatio were confined apart, reserved for the

crowning event of the day. In the one cage crouched the lioness brought from the great African desert, sulky and silent, watching all that went forward with cautious, furtive glance; in the other cage lay an enormous black bear from the Taurus Mountains, its shaggy coat and ponderous bulk, heavy, immobile, lifeless to all appearance save for its small, wicked, wandering eyes.

These two creatures, procured at immense cost and pains, had been the gifts of Alexander himself to the common cause, and the contest between them had been anticipated previous to the advent of the Iconian maiden as the closing and supreme event of the week's festivities.

The signs of carnage and the loathsome traces of brutal battle had now been obliterated from the arena; roses, lilies, and violets had been strewn in lavish profusion over the fresh white sand until the floor seemed paved with flowers; wine and fruit had been given out unstintedly through all the galleries by the munificence of Flavius himself. And now the moving, chattering folk had settled back into their places, every man and woman aware that the awful moment, so dreaded yet so

desired, must be hard at hand, a thrill of passionate suspense and expectation running like wild fire from heart to heart.

For a breathless moment there was a profound silence in which the tension of the situation approached danger point; then suddenly the gay fanfaron of trumpets sounded out upon the fragrant, heated air and every eye was turned in the direction of the tribunal. The iron gates closing the double arch below were thrown open from within and a company of heralds advanced into the arena two by two blowing lustily on their shining silver instruments. Again an excited murmur ran through the ampitheatre, for those whose seats were favorably placed beheld Tryphena the Pontic queen herself, as she appeared for an instant on the threshold, proud and pale in her magnificent robes of state, the tiara on her head. She led by the hand her slender girlish prisoner, whom she then kissed upon the brow and solemnly gave over into the charge of the lanistae who had advanced to receive her.

Instantaneously the group formed itself into a procession, led by the heralds, after whom came

the lanistae escorting Thekla, who was followed closely by a slave bearing aloft the white tablet on which was inscribed in large letters the one word —SACRILEGA. A second company of heralds brought up the rear. The whole procession passed slowly around the outer borders of the arena, the Pontic queen reappearing while this went forward in the balcony above and taking the chair reserved for her within the balustrade at the right of Flavius.

As the procession advanced, all eyes devoured the figure of Thekla superbly clothed in trailing snow-white robes of silk, studded with gems. They marked the patrician grace of her form, her beautiful head with its coronal such as only the daughter of a queen might wear, the surpassing spiritual loveliness of her face, the bearing of her—firm, undaunted, yet maiden-gentle, hard-pressed, men saw, to sustain the brutal boldness of their looks. But the coarsest of them laughed and whispered one another with ribald cunning that they were only playing with the maiden now to get up an appetite for that which was to follow. The serious business of the feast would have higher flavor.

Arrived again at the point from which they had started, the procession broke up; the maiden, led behind the iron gates, was lost to sight for the moment. The heralds left the arena, taking their station, trumpets in their hands, on the inclosing breastwork. Only the lanistae were left. One of these men, a great iron key in his hand, crossed to the cage of the bear and stood in motionless silence before it. The other placed himself, key in hand also, beside that of the lioness.

Once more, after brief and breathless suspense, the iron gates swung wide, grating on their hinges, and over the little bridge spanning the narrow stream, with bare, unsandaled feet, stepped the maiden Thekla. According to the Roman custom, her clothing, save a cincture about the body, had now been removed. But the dark, abundant waves of her hair falling to her knee gave her kindly covering, and the white shield of her spirit's chastity strangely dazzled the piercing glances which would have slain her maidenhood in their cruel lust of her flesh, and God himself defended her. For in the awful glare of that hour the soul of Thekla dwelt not in the frail body dedicated now to devouring

death, but otherwhere, in a secret place of divine over-shadowing, and what men or devils said or thought or willed she knew not nor heeded.

Then her executioners led their victim without delay to the center of the great ellipse, and all the way she walked on roses, and when the thorns tore her tender feet she smiled, for she said to herself, "My Saviour wore a crown of thorns upon his brow; in graciousness he suffers it that, since they seek to tread in his steps, my feet shall tread on thorns."

Now midmost of the arena stood a post of wood and below it lay cords in readiness. With these the maiden was forthwith lightly and loosely bound by wrists and ankles to the stake, not wholly deprived of her freedom of movement, however, lest the coming sport should be robbed of its relish by the loss of the sight of her struggle and resistance. This done, the lanistae drew back, the chief of them lifting his hand as a sign to his fellow, who stood beside the cage of the lioness. Then, while the great key was fitted to the lock and the iron bars were thrown rattling down, Thekla, suddenly aware that she stood thus in the central spot of the

theatre and that the gaze of the masses of men and women on every side was full fixed upon her, clasped her hands, and prayed aloud. Every word, spoken in the clear, sweet, childlike voice, reached the ears of the Lady Tryphena, who listened in agony from her place in the tribunal.

"My Lord and my God," cried Thekla, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, thou art the helper of the persecuted and thou art the companion of the poor; behold thy handmaiden, for, lo, the modesty of women is shamed in me and I stand in the midst of all this people. My Lord and my God, remember thy handmaiden in this hour."

And while the maiden prayed, stealing with padded, cat-like tread, the lioness crept slowly around the arena, her tail twitching from side to side, her glance sullen and ominous, a tawny, fearful thing, yet beautiful; deep-breasted, magnificently modeled, lean and sinewy of body, the flanks under their glossy skin spare, tense, and hard as steel, the snarling lip lifted ever and again while men trembled and women turned faint at sight of the cruel curving of the long, white teeth.

XX

Thekla the Victor

A MUTTER of breathless suspense swept the crowd like a swift gust sweeping over a sea.

The lioness had begun pawing the flowers under her feet, and, sniffing among them had wheeled suddenly, her head slightly lifted, her eyes fixed in an unwinking stare upon the maiden across the arena as if then first discovering her presence. Slowly, with stealthy tread, legs drawn close beneath her body, the creature advanced, dropping her head to sniff the pavement at every step.

All looked to see the maiden droop and fall fainting as she stood motionless in her place, watching as if in spell-bound fascination the appalling approach. But no. As the lioness, now at length close beside her, bent and sniffed her feet, a faint flush rose in Thekla's marble face and she stretched out to the limit of the confining cord

one small hand and laid it, white and light as a lily leaf, on the bristling, tawny head. A wild, irrepressible cry burst forth then from the assembled people. What would follow?

This followed. The lioness slowly lifted her head even to the level of the maiden's face, smelled her lips, her hair, her hands. Then, as if recognizing by her keen scent one she already knew, she bent, licked her feet as she had done on the day before from the confinement of her cage, and presently stretched herself deliberately on the floor before her.

The high priest was perhaps the only spectator in whom this unexpected issue awakened no sense of at least momentary relief. His cold eye, still brooding revenge, wandered ill pleased from the recumbent lioness to the face of the chief of the lanistæ, with whom he was in constant communication.

"She lacks the taste of blood," he muttered under his breath, and made a swift gesture toward the yet unopened cage at the end of the arena. Instantly its door rattled down and out passed the bear with heavy, half-reluctant step, a great rust-colored, shambling shape.

"Then . . . she bent . . . and presently stretched herself deliberately on the floor before her."
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Instantly the lioness showed signs of excitement. Gathering herself to a crouching position, she waited, ready to spring at any moment upon the other beast, whose pig-like nose was stretched far forward as if scenting a foe. Then there was a low growl, a snarl, next a roar, a mighty bound, and the two savage creatures of desert and mountain had met and closed in mortal encounter, rolling in brute frenzy amid the bruised and blood-stained flowers.

For certain desperate moments the issue was doubtful, for the lioness was blinded at the very outset by the tooth and claw of her adversary, and fought wildly but in the end with fearful result. Presently a shout went up to hail the mighty motion with which she ripped open the side of the bear exposing the vitals and ensuring death. But there were some whose eyes had never left the form of the maiden prisoner, and who exclaimed aloud at the sudden change they now beheld in her.

From the semblance of an almost lifeless image as of marble or ivory the girl was suddenly transformed to a creature of will and power and purpose. Before that purpose was known she had

with a magnificent exercise of strength strained and snapped in sunder the cords which loosely bound her wrists and unfastened the knots which confined her ankles. Then with swift bounds, bold, beautiful, strong and wild, like the leap of an antelope, she had gained the granite coping of the stream which flowed sparkling in the sun below the tribunal across half the arena's width. In another instant she was in the water and stood lifting her right hand with a strangely solemn gesture.

No eye lingered longer upon the bloody conflict of the venatio. The bear was plainly as good as dead, and lay a shapeless, shaggy, horrid heap, while the lioness, blood-bespattered, crouched whimpering in anguish, her head buried between her paws. A deep hush fell upon the whole place.

Waist-high in the clear water, with lifted head and eyes aflame with a light of victory and unquenchable joy, Thekla stood and cried with a voice which thrilled every heart mysteriously:

"For this cause am I come unto this city, that I should find my baptism. I, Thekla, baptize myself into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Slowly then her face turned upward to the sky, her hands crossed upon her heart, her eyes closed as if in death or sleep, her body firm and unbending, the maiden sank below the surface of the stream.

Was all over? Did she thus destroy herself to escape the torture and insult and cruel death yet awaiting her? men asked one another, while women gasped and moaned and sobbing wrung hands which longed yet to help and save. "No more shall we see her, beautiful, innocent child. Alas the day!" they cried in swift reaction of tenderness.

Tryphena had risen, as had Flavius, Alexander, and all within the enclosure of the tribunal. With a face like the face of the dead the lady leaned far out over the protecting balustrade and watched that she might see whether from the merciful grave of the little river her beloved one should yet rise again. The seconds had seemed each an hour. The lanistae stood transfixed with amazement at the unlooked-for act of their prisoner. Even Alexander forgot to sign or beckon in exercise of his authority. But already the water stirred, a ripple curved like a thread of light on its surface, and

from the mimic waves rose the maiden and stood lifting her arms to throw back the masses of hair from her face.

"My child!"

Until now Thekla had not seen the queen. Lifting her eyes she perceived the noble face close bending above her.

"Mother," she breathed rather than spoke.

Even with the word there fell from the hands of the Lady Tryphena, stretched far over the balustrade, her own purple mantle. It was caught in the hands of Thekla, who turned then and leaped back upon the coping at the water's edge, with one swift motion drawing the drapery close about her. So standing, the light of heaven itself seeming to be shed upon her brow, the maiden lifted her eyes looking with solemn directness straight into the face of Flavius, who stood above her, leaning eagerly as did all others from the balcony.

"My lord," she said, "I am ready now. Let my death be according to your will and pleasure. You sought it vainly before. I could not die until my baptism had been accomplished, for so the Spirit witnessed."

Flavius recoiled, smitten by an intolerable pang as he caught the mysterious words and felt the noble pathos of the maiden's submission. Something august, majestic, yet withal divinely gentle spoke in her voice, in her eyes, in her marvelous composure.

But her words had not been spoken for effect but with simple earnestness. Already, close wrapped in her royal robe she had turned and traversed the arena to her former position, passing as she went the wounded lioness, who conscious of her approach dragged herself from her writhing prostration, to follow the maid and throw herself once more at her feet. With grateful, pitying glance Thekla bent and sought to soothe the dying creature's pain; then placed for a caress one white foot upon the shaggy, quivering neck. At sight of this a deep roar of wonder and admiration rent the air. Plainly to the heart of the common people the maid was victorious.

But meanwhile Flavius had not been suffered to yield to his natural impulse of gentleness. Alexander was at his elbow advising the best course next to follow in cold, confident assurance that the

ends of what he called justice, and the demands of the law could not suffer defeat. Obedient to his signal the chief of the lanistae had entered the tribunal and now stood before the governor and himself, and but a step removed from the Pontic queen, his swart countenance reeking with sweat and dust, his uniform blood-stained, plainly a repulsive presence to all save Alexander.

"There is no fight left in the creatures yonder," he said, somewhat ruefully, "so much is sure. The bear is dead and the lioness nigh unto it."

"How then, fellow, there must be yet beasts left? Surely all have not been exhausted," cried Alexander angrily.

The lanista knit his brows, counting upon his coarse fingers the items of the reserves with which he had begun the day.

"There has been stiff fighting, and some of the beasts that left the circus you might have thought nearly whole, have died since. But—yes, I have it," and the fellow nodded with satisfied emphasis. "Oh, yes we can keep up the sport yet awhile."

Alexander glanced impatiently at the face of

the governor, nettled at his apathy and aloofness. The sentence was his own. He should participate somewhat at least in such a crisis in its orderly fulfillment. The weary disgust on the face of Flavius gave little token of help in this direction. The Lady Tryphena, Alexander noted, was listening with breathless attention. Of her sympathy with his victim he had seen only too abundant token throughout the day. His irritation grew.

"Very well. Say on. What have you left?"

"The bulls. Two of them are but little the worse for their battle. They fought early in the day, you will remember. They will be fresh again by this time, and a common Phrygian bull has a hundred times the real fury in him that those sulky beasts from Africa have, though you will pardon, master, my saying it."

Alexander looked at the man with an ugly, ill-suppressed scowl, mortified at the scant success of his own princely contribution to the day's sport.

"How would you plan to use the bulls?" he inquired curtly.

"They could be let in upon the maid loose; or, I could do what I have seen done once at Ephesus—

the maiden could be bound well with strong ropes and fastened to the back of one of them ——"

"Ye gods!"

A piercing cry broke from the lips of Tryphena. She rose extending her arms with a gesture of horror and of threatening wrath, took a step, staggered, and fell backward insensible. Flavius caught her as she fell, and bent over her in great agitation.

All this delay had consumed hardly five minutes, but in that brief space a profound revulsion of feeling had swept the changeable multitude. Their earlier gentler feelings returned, powerfully increased by the sight of the lonely, lovely maiden as she stood submissive, defenseless, given over to unmerited death, and yet with that strange light of victory on her face which awed them by its very mystery. As one man the whole vast mass had sprung to their feet. Cries of "Release!" "Release!" "Enough!" "The god defends the maid!" "It is impious to continue!" "Reverse the sentence!" "Judgment!" rose on all sides, the shrill, hysterical voices of the women uppermost, but beneath them

a deep and passionate undertone of protest which proved that the men of Antioch were not yet so Romanized as to lose the barbarians' native manhood.

All this demonstration of popular feeling might have failed of its effect on the malignant hate which had rooted itself in the heart of Cæsar's priest at Thekla's humiliating repulse of his own advances, but that which now went forward in the tribunal was a far different thing. The sight of the powerful Antonian lady, Cæsar's own kinswoman stretched unconscious before him admonished Alexander that he had lost the day. Well he knew that if worse followed to the lady he should be accused to Claudius himself as responsible for the disaster. With face blanched to the lips, trembling limbs, shaken to the very core of his coward, cruel heart, he whispered a hasty, broken sentence in the ear of Flavius.

With a piteous moan Tryphena, whose head was supported by one of her own personal attendants, now opened her eyes. She caught sight of the pale profile of the governor as he stood above her ready to address the people, and riveted her

eyes to his face, listening as for her very life. In the silence which had been called by the blast of the trumpets in the heralds' hands as they stood upon the breastwork of the arena Flavius spoke:

"Good people, you see the virgin yonder, clothed in purple royal as befits a victor. You will not gainsay me if I declare her in the day's contest victor in very deed. She has conquered her savage adversary yonder, so that even the lioness has fought her battle and placed herself beneath her feet to die. In extenuation of this maiden's guilt it can be said that she committed her crime in defense of her vow of chastity of the existence of which your high priest Alexander was ignorant. I pronounce judgment that the Lady Thekla of Iconium, the servant of the god, has served her sentence, and having survived it is released unto you."

In the summer palace of the Lady Tryphena, among the foot-hills of the Sultan Dagh, there was peace after conflict, rest, and a sure haven. Here, a week after her release, in the beautiful tablinum Thekla sat on a low seat at the feet of

her foster mother. Her head rested upon the lady's knee, and upon them both was the unspeakable joy of a perfect love. Around these two sat the maidens of Tryphena, bending over their embroidery frames weaving bright colored silks into the tapestry with deft flying fingers. Then in the quiet and repose of the hour, the queen asked of her daughter a question often on her lips before, yet still unuttered, since hitherto the maiden had been sore spent with her grievous travail of body and spirit.

"Who is thy God, thy Saviour? Tell me of him, my Thekla, for him would I also serve."

"Sweet mother, my Saviour is the Son of the one true and only God, even Jesus Christ who died for me. Let me tell thee of his life and of his death, even as I have heard it from my master, Paul the Messenger."

Then all the maidens dropped their embroidery and looked with longing eyes and listened devoutly, for the Spirit of God dwelt in the heart of Thekla and constrained them. So beginning with the promise of Jehovah to his people of a coming Messiah, and going on to the Cross of Calvary

and the risen Lord, Thekla told them the good tidings of great joy, still new and wonderful, near and real.

And so it followed that Tryphena and her house confessed Christ as their Saviour also, and clave to him from that day forward.

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